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AUTHOR Williams, Helen Margaret
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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to clarify the meaning of the open learning concept by examining it in alternative ways--as an element of social theory, as an intended curriculum, and as a perceived student learning experience. The three curriculum conceptions of open learning are applied to the Australian Open Learning Iniative. Students' curriculum experiences are studied by means of a series of telephone interviews with a targeted sample of 44 students registered with Open Learning Australia in the first study period of 1993. The study identifies the learners' context as a significant but previously unacknowledged constraint on students' decisionmaking and learner control of curriculum. It notes the transfer of control over entering a program of study is not automatically conferred by an open admissions policy, but is, instead, dependent on providers meeting the information needs of students. Chapters include: (1) "Open Learning: A Coat of Many Colours"; (2) "A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of Curriculum Control in Open Learning"; (3) "Philosophy and Method"; (4) "Theoretical Conceptions of Open Learning"; (5) "Intentions Shaping Curriculum Formation in the OLI (Open Learning Initiative)"; (6) "Learners' Experiences as Curriculum Decision Makers on Open Learning"; (7) "New Meaning for Open Learning"; and (8) "Making the Most of Open Learning." Appendixes include sources of personal communications, a letter to students, demographic profiles of student respondents and the interviewed sample, endnotes, and student interview themes. (Contains 479 references.) (Author)

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CURRICULUM CONCEPTIONS OF OPEN LEARNING: THEORY, INTENTION AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN THE AUSTRALIAN OPEN LEARNING INITIATIVE

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of the Queensland University of Technology

by

Helen Margaret Williams
B.Sc.Hons., Dip.Ed. (U. Qld)

School of Curriculum and Professional Studies
Faculty of Education
Queensland University of Technology
Kelvin Grove, Australia
September, 1995.

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QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY THESIS EXAMINATION

CANDIDATE NAME	Helen Margaret Williams
CENTRE/RESEARCH CONCENTRATION	Curriculum Decision Making
PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR	Associate Professor B Elliott
ASSOCIATE SUPERVISOR(S)	Professor A Cumming Dr R Lundin
THESIS TITLE	Curriculum Conceptions of Open Learning: Theory, Intention and Student Experience in the Australian Open Learning Initiative

Under the requirements of PhD regulation 9.2, the above candidate was examined orally by the Faculty. The members of the panel set up for this examination recommend that the thesis be accepted by the University and forwarded to the appointed Committee for examination.

Name R. G. ELLIOTT Signature RG Elliott
Panel Chairperson (Principal Supervisor)

Name B.C Hansford Signature B. C Hansford
Panel Member

Name J McRobbie Signature J McRobbie
Panel Member

****

Under the requirements of PhD regulation 9.15, it is hereby certified that the thesis of the above-named candidate has been examined. I recommend on behalf of the Thesis Examination Committee that the thesis be accepted in fulfilment of the conditions for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Name ALAN CUMMING Signature Alan Cumming Date 23/1/96
Chair of Examiners (Thesis Examination Committee)

KEY WORDS

Australia, distance education,democratisation, curriculum, curriculum codes, higher education, mass education, open learning, Open Learning Initiative.

ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the need to clarify the meaning of the open learning concept. It does so from a curriculum perspective and with a particular focus on curriculum control. The reason for this is that open learning is said to involve control of curriculum by learners.

The study draws on curriculum theory to identify three alternative conceptions of curriculum which are used as alternative ways of considering open learning. Thus, open learning is examined as an element of social theory, as an intended curriculum and as a perceived student learning experience. The analysis is facilitated by the development of a suite of analytical tools, comprising curriculum code theory and the concepts of frame and decision-making space. Students are considered as curriculum decision-makers in order to investigate their latitude for curriculum control from their own perspective. By comparing the three conceptions of open learning listed above as they apply to a particular case of open learning provision, by analysing that case in terms of the suite of analytical tools and by considering the relevant historical and socio-cultural context, a new theory of open learning is generated.

In the first instance, the three curriculum conceptions of open learning are applied to the Australian Open Learning Initiative. The methodology is based on a research philosophy of realist-coherentism. Theory on open learning, which is generic and inclusive of a wide range of views, is analysed and reviewed. Three major categories of theory on open learning (descriptive, prescriptive and explanatory) are considered. The intended curriculum of the Initiative is then detailed primarily from documentary evidence with support from key informant interviews. Students' curriculum experiences are studied by means of a series of telephone interviews with a targeted sample of 44 students registered for units of study with Open Learning Australia (the Open Learning Agency of Australia) in the first study period of 1993.

Comparing theory on open learning with the evidence of the intended curriculum and student experience indicates that a technocratic approach to opening access, rather than learner control of curriculum, is the central feature of this case. Learner-centred features of the curriculum and learner control are not primary aims but rather the by-products of increasing participation primarily through flexibility in the location and timing of study and an open entry policy. Students are seen to be essentially curriculum-takers with curriculum structures acting as strong frames on their decision-making. In relation to its context, the Initiative is seen as a pragmatic response to economic and political pressures to expand participation in higher education and to have implications for centralising control of higher education.

It is proposed that open learning is understandable as a manifestation of educational democratisation. Rather than being a novel post-Fordist or neo-Fordist form of education, it is argued that open learning is a continuation of longer term, progressive educational trends. Open learning is distinctive from earlier progressive educational movements in its adult focus and use of communications technologies. It is suggested that, in the post-industrial era, pressures associated with the attainment of mass higher education are inducing reforms at that level similar to reforms previously enacted in primary and secondary education as these reached mass levels of provision. Evidence for this interpretation extends beyond the Australian case and includes parallels between open learning and the reforms characteristic of democratisation as well as historical data on the expansion of opportunities for adult education.

In terms of curriculum code theory, open learning is seen as an expression of the rational curriculum code. This suggests an amendment to curriculum code theory to acknowledge a lag in the implementation of certain codes at post-secondary level in comparison with schooling. If the patterns previously observed in school education continue to be followed, state intervention is likely to involve further technocratic and internalised controls at this level.

The new theory implies that a systems wide, rather than a piecemeal, approach to the development of national systems of open learning is needed. In Australia, this means fully integrating the Initiative within the Unified National System of Higher Education and making its funding base and systems of student support more equitable with conventional provision.

The study identifies the learners' context as a significant but previously unacknowledged constraint on students' decision-making and learner control of curriculum. It notes that transfer of control over entering a program of study is not automatically conferred by an open admissions policy but is, instead, dependent on providers meeting the information needs of students.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Certification of award iii

Keywords v

Abstract v

Table of contents viii

List of figures xiv

List of tables xiv

List of initialisms and acronyms xv

Author's certification xvii

Acknowledgments xix

Note to readers xix

Chapter 1. Open learning: A coat of many colours

1.1 Introduction 1

1.2 Open learning 3

1.3 The imprecision of the open learning concept 5

1.4 The study 9

1.5 The Australian Open Learning Initiative 13

1.6 Summary and conclusions 16

Endnotes 17

Chapter 2. A conceptual framework for the analysis of curriculum control in open learning

2.1 Introduction 18

2.2 Three traditions of curriculum theorising 19

2.2.1 The liberal-humanist tradition 21

2.2.2 The technocratic tradition 26

2.2.3 The anthropological-relativist tradition 28

2.2.4 Open learning, curriculum control and the traditions 30

2.3 The conceptual framework for analysis 32
2.3.1 Element 1 of the framework 34

2.3.2 Element 2 of the framework 35
2.3.3 Element 3 of the framework 37
2.4 Analytical tools 38
2.4.1 Curriculum codes 39
2.4.2 Frames and perceived decision-making space 47
2.4.3 Decision-making processes 53
2.5 Summary and conclusions 55
Endnotes 56

Chapter 3. Philosophy and method

3.1. Introduction 58
3.2. The 'paradigm' shift 59
3.3 Positivism 62
3.3.1 Undermining positivism 63
3.4 Relativism 67
3.5 Pragmatism 68
3.6 The significance of ontology 69
3.7 New realism and coherentism 72
3.7.1 The ontological status of social phenomena 74
3.7.2 The nature of social science 76
3.7.3 Implications of realism for research methodology 80
3.7.4 Warrants of trustworthiness in research 82
3.8 The inquiry 86
3.9 Summary and conclusions 98
Endnotes 100

Chapter 4. Theoretical conceptions of open learning

4.1 Introduction 102
4.2 Theory on open learning 103

4.2.1 The nature of theory 104
4.3 Literature conceptions of open learning 107
4.3.1 Descriptive theory on open learning 108
4.3.2 Prescriptive theory on open learning 114
4.3.3 Explanatory theory on open learning 118
4.4 Open learning as the post-Fordist approach to education 122
4.4.1 Limitations of the post-Fordist interpretation 124
4.4.2 Progressivism of open learning 125
4.4.3 Time scale of progressive pedagogies 127
4.5 Summary and conclusions 129
Endnotes 132

Chapter 5. Intentions shaping curriculum formation in the OLI

5.1 Introduction 134
5.2 The intended curriculum 134
5.2.1 Intended by whom? 135
5.2.2 The approach of the chapter 136
5.3 Historical background of increasing centralised control 137
5.4 Technological innovation: The television open learning trial 144
5.4.1 Television delivery 145
5.4.2 Open access and increased participation 146
5.4.3 Broadcast quality and an 'add-on' pedagogy 148
5.4.4 Year round curriculum delivery 150
5.4.5 Assessment slippage 151
5.4.6 Promoting Commonwealth objectives 152
5.5 An alternative strand of higher education provision 153
5.5.1 Degree access 154
5.5.2 Intended student population: Meeting unmet demand 156
5.5.3 Tutorial support for school leavers: Year 13. 157
5.5.4 Cost containment: Impact on curriculum 158
5.5.5 User-pays support services 162

5.5.6 The economic rationalist agenda: Balancing industry potential and rampant commercialism 162
5.5.7 Credit transfer 164
5.5.8 Parity of esteem 166
5.5.9 Quality and performance standards 167
5.5.10 Disciplinary spread and modes of delivery 170
5.5.11 Administratively driven curriculum development 171
5.5.12 Submissions driven curriculum development 173
5.5.13 Social justice intentions 173
5.6 Competing agendas of providers 174
5.7 Summary and conclusions 176
Endnotes 181

Chapter 6. Learners' experiences as curriculum decision makers on Open Learning

6.1 Introduction 185
6.2 Vignettes of learners' experiences 186
6.2.1 Vignette 1: Bruce 187
6.2.2 Vignette 2: Mavis 188
6.2.3 Vignette 3: Roe 191
6.2.4 Vignette 4: Douglas 192
6.2.5 Vignette 5: Beth 192
6.3 Learners' curriculum decision-making 194
6.3.1 Frames for learners' decision-making 197
6.4 Entry decision-making 201
6.4.1 Learners' life projects 201
6.4.2 Learners' academic goals 201
6.4.3 Learners' curriculum decision-making space 205
6.4.4 Decision space of Open Learning: Perceived advantages 207
6.4.5 Decision space on Open Learning: Concerns at entry 208
6.4.6 Learners' goal-attainment strategies 210
6.4.7 Learner control over entry 212

6.4.8 Information needed to detail entry decision-making space 214
6.5 Study management decision-making 216
6.5.1 Time management 218
6.5.2 Learning process management 221
6.6 Learners' persistence decision-making 223
6.6.1 Stability of hierarchical goals and strategies 224
6.6.2 Continuation as strategic action 228
6.6.3 Learners' rationales for their lack of persistence 229
6.6.4 Learner frame related reasons for discontinuation 230
6.6.5 Curriculum-structures frame related reasons for discontinuation 231
6.6.6 Perceived quality as a reason for discontinuing 234
6.6.7 The nature and timing of discontinuation decisions 235
6.6.8 Learner control over persistence 237
6.7 Summary and conclusions 237
Endnotes 242

Chapter 7. New meaning for open learning

7.1 Introduction 243
7.2 Congruence of theory, intention and experience in the OLI 243
7.2.1 A technocratic focus on opening access 244
7.2.2 Meeting learners' needs 246
7.2.3 Technology 249
7.2.4 Curriculum control: Learner choice not empowerment 250
7.2.5 Fordism of Open Learning 251
7.2.6 Rhetoric of opportunity 252
7.2.7 The best fit 253
7.3 The contemporary context 254
7.3.1 Centralising control 257
7.4 A new focus for interpretation of Australian OLI 260
7.4.1 Mass education 260
7.4.2 The OLI as democratisation 263
7.4.3 Curriculum code theory and the OLI 266

7.5 New meaning for open learning 268
7.5.1 Novel features of open learning 269
7.5.2 Opening opportunities for adult learning 271
7.5.3 Post-industrial pressures for educational expansion 279
7.5.4 Open learning and the democratisation of post-secondary education 281
7.5.5 Open learning and curriculum code theory 282
7.5.6 Open learning and the invisible curriculum code 284
7.5.7 Accommodating the temporal anomaly 286
7.5.8 Review 289
7.6 Summary and conclusions 291
Endnotes 293

Chapter 8. Making the most of open learning

8.1 Introduction 294
8.2 Outcomes of the study 294
8.3 Implications of open learning as democratisation 297
8.4 Reflections on the study 306
8.5 A final word 311
Endnotes 314

Appendix A Sources of personal communications 315
Appendix B Letter to students 317
Appendix C Demographic profiles of student respondents and the interviewed sample 318
Appendix C Endnotes 319
Appendix D Student interview themes 320

References 323

LIST OF FIGURES

1. The conceptual framework for analysis of curriculum control 36

2. Model of curriculum history in terms of curriculum codes 43

3. Proposed frames on learners' curriculum decision-making space 53

4. Frames and sub-frames defining a learners' curriculum decision-making space 198

5. Aggregated data on planned persistence and its timing 227

LIST OF TABLES

1. Learners' goal-attainment strategies in relation to their access options and preferences 211

2. Learner comments typical of goal-attainment strategies 212

3. Stability of learners' hierarchical goals 225

4. Numbers of students giving different kinds of reasons for their discontinuation decisions 236

5. Demographic data on sample populations 318

LIST OF INITIALISMS AND ACRONYMS

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ACTA	Australian Credit Transfer Agency
AEC	Australian Education Council
ASPESA	Australian and South Pacific External Studies Association
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
AV-CC	Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee
CAE	College of Advanced Education
CTEC	Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission
DEET	(Australian) Department of Employment, Education and Training
EdNa	Education Network for Australia
EFTSU	Effective Full-Time Student Unit
HEAC	Higher Education Administration Charge Monitoring Committee
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
HKOLI	Hong Kong Open Learning Institute
MCEETYA	Ministerial Committee on Education, Employment and Training and Youth Affairs
MOVEET	Ministerial Council on Vocational Education, Employment and Training
NBEET	(Australian) National Board of Employment, Education and Training
NCODE	National Committee on Open and Distance Education
NDEC	(Australian) National Distance Education Conference
NESB	Non-English-Speaking Background
OLA	Open Learning Australia
OLAA	Open Learning Agency of Australia
OLAA APB	Open Learning Agency of Australia Academic Programs Board
OLAA IAPB	Open Learning Agency of Australia Interim Academic Programs Board
OLAA IPC	Open Learning Agency of Australia Interim Planning Committee
OLESS	Open Learning Electronic Support Service
OLI	Open Learning Initiative

OLTC	Open Learning Technology Corporation
PAGE	Professional and Graduate Education
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
SCEET	(Australian House of Representatives) Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training
SCES	(Australian House of Representatives) Standing Committee on External Studies
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TVOLP	Television Open Learning Project
UKOU	United Kingdom Open University
UNE	University of New England
USA	University of South Australia

AUTHOR'S CERTIFICATION

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

I have not been enrolled for another tertiary award during the term of my candidature at the Queensland University of Technology. The substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree.

Signed: Williams

Date: 23 January, 1996

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NOTE TO READERS

For readers' convenience, references cited in other sources have been included in the list of references. Generally in these cases, only the information available in the secondary source could be specified.

Chapter 1

OPEN LEARNING: A COAT OF MANY COLOURS

1.1 Introduction

Open learning is a concept with considerable, and growing, popular appeal and a certain practical utility. Following the success of the Open University in the United Kingdom (UKOU), there has been a proliferation of similar programs around the world (McIntosh, 1985:3668). This growth has not been confined to the university sector and open learning has been employed widely for a variety of educational and training purposes (e.g. Commission on Open and Distance Higher Education in the European Community, 1991:6; Training Agency of the United Kingdom, 1989:ii).

Yet, even though open learning has gained wide acceptance and even though it has been the subject of considerable debate, its character remains unclear (Carr, 1990; Freeman, 1990; Kember and Murphy, 1990; Lewis, 1986, 1990; Rumble, 1989a). While numerous definitions and conceptualisations have been proposed, there is a lack of consensus. It has become commonplace to preface any discussion of open learning with a statement on its multifarious character (e.g. Catchpole, 1992; Kember and Murphy, 1990) and the debate about its nature has grown wearisome. In this context, there is a need for a fresh approach towards understanding open learning in order to stimulate theoretical development and guide innovations in practice.

This study addresses the need to clarify the meaning of the open learning concept. It does not attempt to resolve the definitional stalemate directly but, instead, offers an innovative, theoretical interpretation of the open learning phenomenon. This is its major contribution. The focus of the study is the recently established Australian Open Learning Initiative (OLI). One common conception of open learning is that it gives students greater choices and control over their study program[1] (Carr, 1990; Johnson, 1990a:4, 1990b:69; *Open learning and distance education in Canada*, 1989:1). Analysis of the patterns of curriculum control within this Australian program provides part of the evidence on which the new theory is based.

It is the general contention of this thesis that, despite its novel mode of delivery, open entry policy and flexible study possibilities, the OLI is inadequately characterised in terms of transferring curriculum control to learners. On the contrary, the Initiative is thought to be an example of increasing Commonwealth Government control of higher education in Australia.

The thesis suggests that the practices and ideals of this Initiative, in particular, and open learning programs, in general, be interpreted in terms of the democratisation of higher education. The theory which is developed places the open learning phenomenon within its socio-historic context using curriculum code theory as an aid to interpretation. In so doing, the study not only contributes to theory on open learning but also tests the fit of curriculum code theory with respect to open learning developments in higher education. This analysis indicates an extension necessary to existing curriculum code theory to accommodate open learning.

The new theory has implications for the development of open learning programs in practice and, in its concluding chapter, the thesis explores specific suggestions for Australian policy.

Before a framework for the conduct of the research is developed, it is necessary to provide some background on the nature of open learning and to outline the overall approach of the study. It is also necessary to introduce the Australian Open Learning Initiative within which the investigation is set. This background is provided in Chapter 1. The accounts provided at this stage are deliberately brief in order to avoid repetition when existing theory on open learning and the nature of the Initiative are discussed in detail, as evidence.

Subsequent chapters build on this brief introduction to develop the framework for the study, elaborate the methodology in greater detail and discuss the evidence leading to the new interpretation and its policy implications.

1.2 Open learning

Open learning systems of education originated in name, although not entirely (as Chapter 7 shows), in nature, with the establishment of the UKOU in 1969 (Perry, W., 1977:3101). This university has been eminently successful. Within two years of admitting its first students, it had become the largest university in the United Kingdom (Daniel, 1988:178). Since then, it has successfully graduated large numbers of students (Daniel and Stroud, 1981) and served as a model for the establishment of distance-teaching universities in many countries (McIntosh, 1985:3668). This occurred at a time of worldwide expansion in the use of distance provision for higher education during the 1970s and 1980s (Keegan and Rumble, 1982:24).

Open learning has expanded and continues to expand not only for higher education but also for other post-compulsory, vocational credentialing and, more recently, schooling (e.g. Lacey, 1993). It has been used in formal educational provision, for workplace training, and professional upgrading (e.g. Lundin, Williams, Bartlett, Gerber and Scriven, 1991:18). Recent developments in technology (here defined to include both material and ideational components) associated with the post-industrial age have not only created a need for increased and ongoing education and training but also offer new ways of teaching and learning (Lundin et al., 1993:18,23). The thrust is towards on-site training programs, flexible study arrangements and self-directed learning using self-study packages and advanced communications to link learners and teachers at separate sites.

The need for open learning systems promoting access to education is intuitively apparent to those with a liberal educational philosophy and attractive to proponents of social justice on principles of equity. Open learning is also justifiable on instrumental and economically rational grounds as an effective, efficient and flexible means of meeting educational needs in an era of rapid change in which knowledge quickly becomes outdated. While its recent political popularity may serve technical and political interests (Edwards, 1991), there are those who regard open learning as a progressive, even emancipatory, educational good (e.g. Boot and Hodgson, 1987:8; Snell, Hodgson and Mann, 1987:161).

Education, including open learning, is seemingly embroiled in the broader process of social change. In this situation, there is a need for fundamental reviews of educational thinking and direction (Maddison, 1983:16-17). Australian educational responses in this context include trends such as:

- increasing participation in higher education (Australian Department of Employment, Education and Training [DEET], 1990a:9);

- expanding credit transfer mechanisms which have crystallised in the establishment of the Australian Credit Transfer Agency (ACTA) owned by the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AV-CC); and

- increasing interest at a national level in the use of communications technologies for instruction. As examples, the Australian Education Council (AEC) and Ministerial Council on Vocational Education, Employment and Training (MOVEET) have jointly established the Open Learning Technology Corporation (OLTC). Open Net has been established as part of an Education Network for Australia (EdNa)[2].

Despite the directions signalled by these trends, considerable tension on ways to proceed nevertheless exists. The commissioning of a Senate Inquiry into the development of open learning in 1994 corroborates this uncertainty (Australian Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee [Senate Inquiry], 1994). Some stakeholders argue that the focus of future work should be on technical capabilities and the achievement of political agendas, as Edwards (1991) asserts is currently the case. Others argue that the focus should be on attitudinal and organisational changes within systems and institutions (e.g. Meacham, 1990).

According to Johnson (1990b:69), many elements of open learning have existed in

Australia for some time. By this, he was referring to the opportunities for part-time and external study generally available in Australia. Nevertheless, several, recent initiatives aspire to open learning in their nomenclature. Examples include the Queensland Open Learning Centre Network (Lundin, 1990:3); the Open Learning Technology Corporation (OLTC); the Open Learning Policy Unit created within the Australian Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), as well as the $2 million Television Open Learning Project (TVOLP) and the $50.9 million OLI sponsored by DEET (Baldwin, 1992a:16). These latter two projects involved the use of broadcast television for the delivery of higher education.

These initiatives appear to place distance education in Australia at the threshold of a new era in which open learning is being set to play a more prominent role. Adding to this, current trends within higher educational institutions are blurring the distinction between internal and external students (Lundin et al., 1991; Moodie, 1994:29) so that open learning is likely to affect both distance higher education and traditional provision. Increasingly, the potential to apply mechanisms of open learning to conventional university teaching, off-campus provision and all forms of instruction is being recognised.

However, assigning an educational innovation the title of 'open learning' does not necessarily identify the educational philosophies or practices which pertain to it, because the definition of open learning is problematic (Carr, 1990; Freeman, 1990; Kember and Murphy, 1990; Lewis, 1986, 1990; Rumble, 1989a).

1.3 The imprecision of the open learning concept

Part of the problem in defining future directions and communicating the meaning of open learning arises from the imprecision of the open learning concept. The term is both historically unstable and contemporaneously ill-defined with multiple referents as indicated below. It is not only that the meaning of the term has changed over time but also that there are, at present, multiple conceptions of its meaning. In addition, there is no definitive theory on open learning (see Chapter 4).

The meaning of open learning overlaps and extends the nomenclature used for non-traditional, educational provision, particularly that known as distance education. However, while 'open learning' and 'distance education' are similar in a number of respects, the two terms are not, generally, regarded as synonymous (Foks, 1987 cited in Smith, P., and Kelly, 1987:74; Keegan, 1990:23-24; Kember and Murphy, 1990; Lewis and Spencer, 1986; Smith and Kelly, 1987:2). Thus, even though there is a lack of consensus on definition, there is considerable agreement that open learning and distance education are distinct.

Although open learning derives its name from the UKOU, a number of the practices and philosophies introduced by that university to the United Kingdom were in existence elsewhere prior to its establishment. For example, television universities had been established in China before 1960 (Chunjie, 1992) and part-time, university correspondence study was accepted practice in countries such as Australia and the United States (MacKenzie, Christenson and Rigby, 1968:27; MacKenzie, Postgate and Scupham, 1975:99-100).

University provision of a non-traditional kind is traceable to extra-mural instruction - a term which means, literally, outside the walls. In Victorian England, provision for students unable to attend on-campus originally took the form of itinerant, lecturing programs and was associated with social movements for the education of women and the working classes (Jepson, 1973:7,31,47; Marriott, 1981:1,11). Extra-mural teaching broadened into the concept of university extension. This encompassed teaching methods in which the lecturer and student did not meet together face-to face, as well as off-campus and evening lectures (e.g. MacKenzie, et al., 1968:27). Extension also included provision for home-study which employed some form of technology to bridge a physical separation of teacher and student.

Methods for teaching students 'at a distance' have changed progressively over time both in terms of the communications technologies employed and the educational philosophies directing practice. Technologies based on the postal system have been supplemented by electronic methods of communication while attitudes have changed from regarding non-traditional methods as inferior, to having value-added appeal (Lundin et al., 1993:23). Changes in form have been reflected in the succession of nomenclature. Thus, there has been a change in the names of such programs from 'correspondence' to 'external studies', to 'distance education', then to 'open access' and 'open learning' (e.g. Campion and Kelly, 1988; Holmberg, 1990; Lundin et al., 1991:7-9).

Early use of the open learning concept included programs such as Australian university external studies courses within its umbrella of meaning (MacKenzie et al., 1975:19). These did not employ the open entry policy or television mode of delivery of the UKOU and this suggests that open learning has been equated with distance provision. Continuing this trend, distance facilities in Australia were, in some cases, in 1993, being redesignated as open learning units without significant changes in policy or practice to accompany the change in name (Scriven, 1993, pers. com.).

At the present time, 'open access' implies increasing participation in education through the removal of some of the traditional barriers to further study such as entry requirements, cost, and geographical constraints (Lundin et al., 1991:7). On the other hand, 'open learning' can denote a system of educational provision tailored to the needs of individual learners and giving learners greater choice, responsibility, autonomy and control over the content, timing, sequencing and assessment of their learning (Carr, 1990; Johnson, 1990a:4). These elements can thus become more flexible, even negotiable, between learner and educational provider with the learners allowed significant control over the direction and design of their learning programs. While there are examples of programs employing these practices, other open learning programs differ little from conventional, external studies programs (e.g. MacKenzie et al., 1975:19; Wedmeyer, 1977). As a result, the nature of open learning is unclear.

The use of the word, 'open' in the name of the British university referred to its lack of entry requirements, its use of communications media to promote its educational purposes, its flexibility of study location and openness to ideas (McIntosh, 1985:3668). In actual practice, administrative decisions within the university meant that entry became, in effect, less open than had been planned. While entry was, in principle, open to all, enrolment was restricted to students over the age of 21 and effected through a queuing system which prioritised entry of students in order to fill regional, course and occupational quotas (Harris, 1987:16; MacKenzie et al., 1975:16).

This early shortfall between the ideals set for open learning and the attainments realised in practice is typical of an ongoing dichotomy between aspiration and actuality which often compounds historical problems of definition. Conceptualisations of open learning 'as it was' differ from those of open learning 'as it is' and as it is thought 'should be'. Furthermore, conceptualisations of open learning 'as it is' are varied.

The terminology used for non-traditional forms of educational provision is clearly evolving in conjunction with changing practice. The lack of semantic clarity accompanying these changes is not only confusing but also open to political exploitation. This applies particularly to open learning because of connotations of the word, open. As early as 1975, it was commented of open learning that:

> ...as an inscription to be carried in procession on a banner, gathering adherents and enthusiasms, it has great potential. For its very imprecision enables it to accommodate many different ideas and aims and the two terms of the phrase carry with them emotional overtones...(MacKenzie et al., 1975:15).

As well as reinforcing the ambiguity of the term by reference to the plurality of ideas it encompasses, this quotation captures the inspirational and transformatory nature of the concept and apparently aligns open learning with philosophies and belief systems at the forefront of an expanding, educational movement. While there is obvious potential for such an inspirational concept to bolster positive, educational change, there is also the potential for its imprecision and tolerance of a variety of meanings to be used to legitimate pre-determined policy directions and serve political or technical interests. Bourdieu (1977:648 cited in Codd, 1988:242) concluded:

> Language is not only an instrument of communication or even of knowledge, but also an instrument of power. One seeks not only to be understood but also to be believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished.

Apple (1982:151) and Codd (1988) explain how language may be used in educational policy documents for the purposes of engineering consent and legitimating the activities of the State. This is achieved through development and deployment of discourse broad enough to accommodate competing views and be meaningful to broad sectors of society.

From a cynical perspective, it is possible that the inspirational appeal and imprecision of open learning may be employed as a means of control to smooth policy shifts on educational provision implemented, primarily, for much more pragmatic, utilitarian, political or economically rationalist reasons. It may even be the case, as Edwards (1991) has postulated, that the concept of open learning is being used to maintain social order and retain present systems of political control by deflecting responsibility for social ills, such as unemployment, from government to individuals. This potential of open learning flows from its imprecision and its focus on the individual.

Dewey (1976:273) regarded theoretical tensions in education to be indicative of contradictory elements arising from the way problems are posed. The solution, he suggested, involved a reconceptualistion and resynthesis of the conflicting elements to see the problem in a fresh light. With respect to open learning, there is an obvious need for such a fresh approach in order for the field to develop. Because of the growing significance of open learning, the imprecision of the open learning concept, and the dangers inherently accompanying a lack of semantic clarity, this need is particularly urgent.

1.4 The study

This study addresses the task of reassessing and clarifying the meaning of open learning. It does so primarily through an examination of one particular case. The study makes a general contribution to theory on open learning and compiles detailed knowledge of a significant Australian innovation. The focus of the study is the Australian Open Learning Initiative. This proved to be an ideal case from which to investigate open learning in the Australian context because of its national prominence and significance.

A number of previous studies have analysed open learning using a series of dichotomies or unvalidated semantic differentials representing the open to closed extremes of various policy issues thought to be linked to openness (e.g. Kember and Murphy, 1990; Lewis, 1986, 1990). How open an educational program was considered to be, was measured by the extent to which students decided issues such as the timing, location, content, mode and assessment of their learning. This kind of approach was rejected for the present purpose as its potential to illuminate the nature of open learning seemed limited and likely to be overly influenced by established, literature conceptions of openness lacking sensitivity to the student perspective.

A small number of studies, most notably Edwards (1991) but also Farnes (1993) and, less directly, Gee and Lankshear (1995) have sought to explain open learning with reference to its cultural and historical context. A similar approach is adopted here. The existence of this body of interpretive theory does not obviate the need for the study, however, for while a number of competing interpretations exist, none is regarded as adequate, particularly from a curriculum perspective. The reasons for this are elaborated in Chapter 4.

The fresh perspective offered by this study derives from an interdisciplinary approach in which open learning is regarded as a curriculum phenomenon and openness is seen as an issue of curriculum control. The rationale for adopting this approach is as follows.

In a general way, open learning falls within the bounds of curriculum theorising on the grounds that it is an educational form. In addition to this, the curriculum perspective is particularly appropriate given that the flexibility of open learning is said to give learners greater choice and control over their study (Carr, 1990; Johnson, 1990a:4; *Open learning and distance education in Canada*, 1989:1). The educational policies open to student control are such things as the timing, location, content and mode of study and its assessment. These are fundamental questions of curriculum design (Walker, D., 1990:1-18) and this forges a link between open learning and issues of curriculum. Furthermore, as the central issue is the extent to which students decide aspects of curriculum, open learning is conceived, in this study, as a curriculum phenomenon associated with issues of curriculum control. This is understood to be a novel approach as no previous studies construing open learning in this manner could be located.

Thinking of open learning in this way, invites integration of knowledge from the separate fields of open learning and curriculum and this assists in generating the insights provided by the study. It does not, however, exhaust the possible approaches which might have been taken and the study is, in a sense, limited to interpreting open learning as a curriculum phenomenon rather than more broadly as an emerging social or cultural practice.

Two additional mechanisms contribute to the interpretation developed by the study. Firstly, the student perspective is included in an empirical way and secondly, the time frame within which explanations of open learning are sought has been extended beyond those normally taken into account. With respect to the former mechanism, open learning is an educational phenomenon for which the student perspective is particularly relevant, not only because students are major stakeholders in open learning, but also because transfer of curriculum control to learners is commonly implied. With respect to the latter mechanism, whereas previous efforts to contextualise open learning have, in the main, concentrated on the post-industrial era (e.g. Edwards, 1991; Farnes, 1993), the present research examines open learning within the framework of curriculum history and benefits from a greatly extended temporal perspective.

As already indicated, the study sets out to interpret open learning with reference to its socio-historic context. The rationale for this approach is provided in the following chapter in which the conceptual framework for study is developed. The framework is derived from a review of curriculum and curriculum theorising and from the nature of the definitional debate on open learning. Its value extends beyond the immediate purposes of this study because it may be applied to similar studies of open learning either as a means of analysing patterns and structures of curriculum control or as a means of validating the new theory with a larger number of cases.

The overall design for the conduct of the research, specified in the framework, involves synthesising evidence from three separate perspectives on open learning. After developing the framework in Chapter 2 and elaborating both its methodological assumptions and specific procedures in Chapter 3, the thesis unfolds according to the design established in this framework. In Chapter 4, the theory of open learning is examined as the first source of evidence informing the analysis. Chapters 5 and 6 report the intended curriculum of the Open Learning Initiative and the experiences of students undertaking the program respectively. Together, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 relate three alternative curriculum conceptions of open learning. The evidence of these together with the relevant context is synthesised in the concluding chapters to generate new meaning for open learning. This is the basis for considering specific policy implications for Australia in the final chapter.

The study has both theoretical and practical value. Its theoretical contribution derives from the application of curriculum theory to open learning and from analysis of one specific case, the Australian Open Learning Initiative. A portion of the evidence is independent of the case as it concerns existing, theoretical conceptions of the open learning phenomenon as a whole. Other portions of the evidence pertain specifically to the case. Because much of the evidence is case-related, the interpretation generated by the study must be seen as applicable to the case in point in the first instance. Yet, even though the use of a case approach requires caution as to the extent to which the findings are generally applicable, there is evidence to suggest that the interpretation may have widespread applicability as a way of understanding the open learning phenomenon. In view of these considerations, the interpretation offered by the study can be regarded as new theory which is, nevertheless, tentative and in need of validation through analysis of additional cases.

The prime, practical value of the study lies in providing a sound basis for debate on future policy directions for university open learning in Australia. Because of this, the study contains the potential to contribute to the quality of teaching and learning in that context. Having sketched the thesis in broad outline, it is appropriate to consider the focus of the study in more detail.

1.5 The Australian Open Learning Initiative

The Australian Open Learning Initiative formally commenced operations in March, 1993 offering university courses supported by television delivery. The Initiative built upon, and foreshortened, a trial project in the preceding year and meant that, for the first time in Australia, it would be possible to complete a university degree through open learning. Prior to 1992, there had been few serious efforts to use broadcast television for higher education in Australia (Black and Moodie, 1991; Grieg, 1987; Moodie, 1992a). In that year, the TVOLP, run by a consortium of five universities with the sponsorship of the Commonwealth government, offered seven first year university units in a trial of the use of television for university education (Keepes, 1993:1.3; TVOLP Consortium, 1991:4). The units were offered without pre-requisites or other entry requirements at a cost to students which approximated that of conventional, undergraduate study. Television programs accompanying the units were screened nationally by the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC). The universities of the consortium agreed to grant credit for units successfully completed through the TVOLP towards their standard degrees as appropriate. However, students would need to compete for a university place funded within the Unified National System of Higher Education to complete their studies unless they were prepared to pay the full cost of a university education.

The TVOLP was intended as a two year trial. However, in the August budget of that first year, the federal government announced that the trial project would be replaced by an Open Learning Initiative which would enable students to complete degrees in this mode (Cribb, 1992). An establishment grant of $50.9 million for the Initiative was to be divided between a curriculum delivery component to be let by competitive tender and an electronic student support network to be pursued initially through a feasibility study also awarded by tender (Baldwin, 1992a:16).

Monash University subsequently won the contract for curriculum provision and established a company known as the Open Learning Agency of Australia Pty. Ltd. (OLAA) for this purpose. From 1994, this company has traded and marketed its courses under the name, Open Learning Australia (OLA) and, in deference to current usage, the latter name is used throughout this work. The exception to this is that the acronym, OLAA, is used for bibliographic purposes. This is because publications continue to be copyrighted under the full company name.

A contractual agreement between the Commonwealth government and the Open Learning Agency of Australia set the framework for curriculum delivery in which OLA would act as a broker of educational services and sub-contract unit provision from established universities (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993). Although OLA had no charter to grant degrees of its own, students could apply for credit for its units towards degrees offered by participating universities. In the initial stages, Monash University offered two such degrees, the Bachelor of General Studies and the Bachelor of Business which could be completed entirely through Open Learning (Monash University, 1993:1). Participating universities could be involved in curriculum development and management on condition that they offered pathways by which these studies could be credited towards degrees (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993:7).

These were novel and significant developments for Australia in many ways. At the time, the federal Minister for Higher Education, Mr Baldwin, indicated that he expected Television Open Learning to catalyse a revolution in the delivery of higher education in Australia (Healy, 1992). Minister Dawkins (cited in Senate Inquiry, 1994:55) stated in his budget speech in 1992 that "every Australian with access to a television and a letter box can now have access to a university education".

The formal objectives of the Initiative were to:

> - "increase flexibility and innovation in the provision of high quality tertiary education services,
>
> - widen and facilitate access to tertiary education through provision of off-campus courses in a wide range of subjects of high demand at costs to participants broadly equivalent to HECS [the undergraduate charge imposed under the Higher Education Contribution Scheme],
>
> - build on the long experience, depth of expertise and extensive range of course offerings and infrastructure of distance education, and also, the more recent success of the pilot Television Open Learning Project and open learning initiatives in the TAFE sector [Technical and Further Education]" (DEET, 1992a:1).

Other observers saw the Initiative as a "cheap way out of the problem of unmet demand" (Dwyer, 1992:27) which had "the potential to cheapen the quality of the degrees people get" through inadequate support (Tapiolas, 1992:5). Clearly, the implications of the Initiative are contestable. The significance of the innovation is magnified when seen as part of a more generalised expansion of open learning across all sectors of education and training in Australia, as part of a broader, reform agenda for higher education in that country and as a component in the Government's plans for economic adjustment (e.g. Dawkins, 1988a, 1990a; Dawkins and Holding, 1987).

The Commonwealth's Open Learning Initiative is the focus of this study. This is signified in the text as OLI or Open Learning with capitals. It should be noted that, at the time the research was undertaken, the Initiative was limited, in practice, to its curriculum delivery component as the student support network was yet to be established. The OLI is not to be confused with the OLAA, which was the name of the company running the project in conjunction with provider universities and the ABC at the time of the study, nor with its trading name, OLA. Neither is the OLI the same as the TVOLP which refers specifically to the original trial project.

The Initiative is a developing, evolving entity. For this reason, the study must be regarded as a snapshot illuminating its nature at the time the research was undertaken. That time represents an early phase in the Initiative's development and significant ongoing change can be anticipated. Nevertheless, since many major and supposedly permanent features of the intended curriculum of the Initiative had been established by this time, the study has continuing, as well as historical, relevance. The new theory is general in nature and it is unlikely that the incremental development referred to above would alter the conclusions of the study in any significant way.

1.6 Summary and conclusions

This chapter has established the need for a reassessment of the meaning of the open learning concept. This need stems from the imprecision of the concept, the growing significance of this form of provision and possible consequences of allowing the present state of confusion to persist.

Previous studies have either sought to define open learning in terms of educational policy over which students have (or should have) control, to describe open learning systems or to explain them by reference to the contemporary socio-cultural context. Whereas studies of the first kind have been conceptually limited and restricted to an institutional perspective, the others have operated within a narrow contextual horizon.

This thesis aims to make a contribution to theory on open learning. It proceeds from a curriculum perspective and investigates the Australian Open Learning Initiative in the first instance.

This chapter has presented the issue under consideration and provided introductory information on both open learning and the OLI. The following chapter elaborates the conceptual framework on which the study is based. In part, the present chapter has argued that this should centre on curriculum control and take the student perspective into account. Following the development of the framework, the specific procedures and methodological assumptions of the study are made explicit. From these foundations, the thesis examines three curriculum conceptions of open learning as evidence for its interpretation and specific policy implications.

Endnotes

1. Various alternative conceptions of open learning are reviewed in Chapter four. These include views of open learning in terms of expanding access, meeting learners' needs, flexibility of educational provision, educational technology and post-industrial capitalism.

2. Open Net was established by the Ministerial Committee on Education, Employment and Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) and is jointly owned by the OLTC and the Open Learning Agency of Australia.

Chapter 2

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ANALYSIS OF CURRICULUM CONTROL IN OPEN LEARNING

2.1 Introduction

Curriculum control is a pivotal concept in this study of open learning and, using this as an organising focus, a conceptual framework for the analysis is developed in this chapter. The framework is derived from a review of curriculum and curriculum theorising and serves a number of purposes. The first purpose is to assess the potential of contemporary curriculum theory to assist the research. The second is to align the study with contemporary traditions of curriculum theorising and the third is to locate significant points of tension in conceptions of curriculum as a basis for the framework. An additional, subsidiary aim of the review is to begin to set open learning in context by drawing attention to historical changes in the notion of curriculum and its control.

Following this review, the framework for the study is presented. This is comprised of three main elements which are specifically: a set of vantage points from which open learning may be investigated, a suite of analytical tools focussing on curriculum control and an interpretive method.

After sketching the entire framework in broad outline, the suite of analytical tools is discussed in some detail. This is composed of pre-existing, but partially isolated, concepts and theory unified as a package useful for the analysis and interpretation of open learning.

In effect, the chapter develops an overall design for the study and its task of interpreting open learning. In subsequent chapters, this design is applied to the Australian Open Learning Initiative and then extrapolated to the open learning phenomenon as a whole.

2.2 Three traditions of curriculum theorising

Conceptualising open learning in terms of curriculum control opens new fields of theory which may have relevance for open learning. Curriculum theory, in general, becomes a potential resource, as does specific theory on curriculum control. For the purposes of this study, control is taken to mean "the opportunity and ability to influence the course of events" (Garrison, D., 1989:27). Curriculum control thus refers to the direction or influence of curriculum development and is taken to include subtle social and contextual forces as well as more obvious forms of control such as mandated change.

Like open learning, the concept, curriculum, is far from unambiguous. At the present time, it is interpreted differently within different schools of thought (Golby, 1988; Skilbeck and Cotter, 1988:137). It has also been interpreted in different ways at different times (Lawton, 1983:3; Kemmis and Fitzclarence, 1986:23). This diversity of meaning is corroborated by the large collection of definitions compiled by D. Smith and Lovat (1990:4). The historical sensitivity of the term is apparent in histories of education such as those of Broudy and Palmer (1965), Bowen (1972), Connell (1980) and Lundgren (1983).

This state of imprecision could be attributable to the relatively recent development of curriculum as a disciplinary field or to its immature nature, as Goodlad (1994:1262) suggests may be the case. However, it is also likely that alternative conceptions reflect alternative assumptions about teaching and learning as well as conflicting purposes and interests (Smith, D., 1983a:32). These shape the issues seen to be problematic and the ways adopted in search of resolution. Since any research is a product of its time and a reflection of contemporary knowledge, it is important to locate the present study within a theoretical context and identify, as far as possible, the assumptions and pre-dispositions of the researcher (Kemmis and Fitzclarence, 1986:34).

For this reason, the review which follows serves to position the study within the field of curriculum and align it with contemporary traditions of curriculum theorising. It also assesses the relevance of curriculum theory for analysing and interpreting open learning. Through the review, a tradition with potential to facilitate the research is identified and this encompasses theory on curriculum control. The review also highlights points of tension in the way curriculum is conceived and these are used to suggest a design for the study incorporating alternative curriculum conceptions of open learning.

From the diversity of conceptions of curriculum referred to above, Golby (1988:153) has distilled three traditions of curriculum theorising. These are the liberal-humanist tradition, the technocratic tradition, and the anthropological-relativist tradition. Although Golby's schema is neither unique nor definitive (e.g. Eisner and Vallance, 1965:5; Pinar, 1978; Reid, W., 1981:160-167), it is both comprehensive and current. It is used as an introduction to the field and as a means of locating the research within an established tradition.

While the first two traditions prove inadequate as a basis for investigating open learning, they are included in order to provide an historical perspective to the changing nature of curriculum and curriculum theorising. While inadequate as means, these traditions provide conceptual content relevant to considering open learning as curriculum. An historical and contextualised approach is adopted in reviewing the three traditions. This immediately discloses the anthropological-relativist positioning of the study and provides relevant background. In this tradition, particular emphasis is placed on interpreting curriculum within its socio-historic context and this is seen as a potentially fruitful way of proceeding.

Although Golby's (1988:153) contribution is relatively recent, it is consistent with earlier discussion and debate in which that which Golby distinguishes as the liberal-humanist, technocratic and anthropological-relativist traditions was referred to by other names. The discussion draws on this earlier material and refers to traditional, liberal-humanist or classical education as part of the liberal-humanist tradition, technical, positivist or empiricist approaches as part of the technocratic tradition, and cultural approaches as part of the anthropological-relativist tradition.

In the discussion which follows, a distinction needs to be made between curriculum as a concept, as a social and educational phenomenon and as a field of study. While curriculum as a concept has a centuries old history and curriculum as a phenomenon one which is, arguably, older still, curriculum as discipline is a twentieth century invention (Golby, 1988:152; Goodlad, 1994:1262). Golby's (1988:153) schema of traditions represents a theory **about** theories **for** curriculum building. While theories **for** curriculum building have only recently been recognised as such, and theories **about** theories **for** curriculum building are even more recent, their heritage lies in the principles informing educational philosophy and practice since classical antiquity.

2.2.1 The liberal-humanist tradition

As a formal concept, the notion of curriculum has been traced to Scotland, in the seventeenth century, where the term was used to refer to the orderly sequence and yearly cycle of studies developed by Ramus to train Calvinist preachers (Hamilton, 1990:26; Kemmis and Fitzclarence, 1986:24). Literally, the term meant a course to be run (Skilbeck and Cotter, 1988:137). Curriculum, in this sense, referred to a formal program of study incorporating both sequence and method as well as content (Hamilton, 1990:13,26).

As a social phenomenon, on the other hand, modern curricula are traceable to the educational system of the ancient Greeks[1] (Lundgren, 1983:16). The Greek curriculum was formalised by the Romans into the quadrivium and trivium which continued as the seven liberal arts and served as the foundation of university curricula in medieval times (Johnson, 1968:11; Lundgren, 1983:16; Skilbeck and Cotter, 1988:139). The residue of this ancient form remains in modern, liberal-humanist systems of education and in the tradition of curriculum theorising which Golby (1988:153) recognises by the same name.

There is debate on whether education, as it existed in classical Greece and Rome, can properly be called curriculum for it was more a body of knowledge than a sequence and method of instruction (Hamilton, 1990:13). This is dependent upon the definition of curriculum adopted. Classical and medieval systems of education do conform with Lundgren's (1983:11) conception which is adopted in this study and described below. This conception associates curriculum with formal systems of selecting, organising and transmitting knowledge.

Lundgren (1983:11) attributes the need for curriculum, as an element of social structure, to the creation of formal systems of learning divorced from everyday contexts of knowledge creation and knowledge use. Prior to the development of teaching as a specialised division of labour, knowledge was acquired by the young entirely through their lived experiences within the family group or as an apprentice to a craft master (Bowles and Gintis, 1976:156; Dewey, 1916:7-8). The technology of separating education as a specialist activity is thought to have created the need to consider the content and means of transmitting knowledge which had previously been automatic as a consequence of participating in work and other social activities (Lundgren, 1983:11). It is also thought to have created the need to represent productive processes so that they could be reproduced outside their context of use. This need was met, initially, by written texts (Lundgren, 1983:12, 1991:12) which was only possible in highly literate societies (Bruner, 1966:154).

The development of teaching as a specialised activity and the invention of flexible systems for writing and numerating were revolutionary, technological developments which are thought to have stimulated new ways of managing knowledge, new instructional practices and new philosophies of education[2] (Ashby, 1967 cited in Carnegie Commission, 1972:9). These technologies were intimately connected with the development of the classical curriculum as they facilitated the storage, dissemination and reproduction of information, improved its accuracy and encouraged its systematic analysis (Bowen, 1972:60; Domonkos, 1977:2021-2; Watt and Goody, 1963:331). Prior to these developments, knowledge was, presumably, controlled by social rules regulating participation in oral traditions.

Modern liberal-humanist curricula, like the quadrivium and trivium from which they are ultimately derived, organise knowledge into distinct disciplines based on subject matter (Golby, 1988:155; Skilbeck and Cotter, 1988:140). Curriculum formation in these systems is based upon ideas about the fundamental nature of knowledge. Aristotle originally proposed three basic divisions, the disciplines of the theoretical, the practical or deliberative, and the productive (Schwab, 1964:15-16). These were devoted to knowing, to deciding and to making respectively.

It appears that technological development is capable of precipitating major change in curriculum and the control of knowledge. Some commentators, for example D. Walker (1985:93), consider technology to be the most powerful force for educational change at the present time and it has been suggested that technology is an important element in open learning (e.g. Bosworth, 1991:1).

Liberal-humanist education stresses development of cognitive skills and the whole individual (Skilbeck and Cotter, 1988:140). The aim of contemporary versions is to initiate individuals into the forms of knowledge and ways of thinking of the disciplines so that they may participate in these activities (Bruner, 1966:72; , 1966:51). In this tradition, the gaining of knowledge is regarded as fulfilment of the mind, satisfying as an end in itself, and an essential element of life (Hirst, 1974:3). Theories **for** curriculum building in this tradition, stress analysis of the conceptual content and modes of reasoning within disciplines as a basis for selecting subject material and organising learning activities. The intention is to examine the structure and relation of the parts within subjects to enable their logical transmission and effective, efficient learning (e.g. Bruner, 1966:41; Ford and Pughno, 1964 cited in Golby, 1988:155).

The liberal-humanist tradition is essentially knowledge centred, meaning that consideration of subject matter is its central, organising principle (Golby, 1988:155). According to Bernstein (1974:82), in this tradition, learning is subservient to the established, academic discipline and takes the form of a long initiation in which knowledge is won through self-discipline. The emphasis in teaching is on the transmission of knowledge and the reproduction of academic culture.

Curricula built from content have been expressed in prescribed texts, syllabi and evaluation instruments (Skilbeck and Cotter, 1988:139). These regulate the activities of teachers and the learning experiences of students. Where emphasis on content is strong, the knowledge to be learned is taken as pre-determined, teaching is seen as disseminatory and learning is considered a matter of acquiring pre-existing understandings and mastering necessary skills (Ramsden, 1992:111). Liberal-humanist curricula are elitist, non-utilitarian and associated with concern to maintain academic standards (Bernstein, 1974:82,102; Lawton, 1983:7).

There are difficulties with the liberal-humanist tradition as theory **for** curriculum formation and it has been both extensively criticised and staunchly defended - to wit, the debate versus Hirst and Peters. For instance, while an understanding of the nature of disciplines may well assist in developing principles of educational practice relevant to particular disciplines, it is insufficient as a basis for wider curriculum planning or theory building for practice. This is so as beliefs, values and human judgement are necessarily involved and because knowledge external to the disciplines, such as learning theory and social science, must also be taken into account (Reid, W., 1981:168, 1978:57). This has been recognised even by proponents of the tradition such as Hirst (1983:4,26).

Similarly, while a knowledge-centred approach may have been appropriate for transmitting the accumulated culture of the Ancient Greeks, for the training of literate priests in medieval times, and for preserving and restoring ancient knowledge almost lost through the Dark Ages, it is, arguably, less suitable in systems of compulsory schooling (Bantock, 1971 cited in Skilbeck and Cotter, 1988:156) and in the present era. It is argued that a non-utilitarian education neglects contemporary economic and social needs (Pring, 1993:58) and with the volume of knowledge continually expanding, content alone becomes inadequate as a basis for selecting material for inclusion in courses and other criteria must be employed. Typically, the uses to which the knowledge is to be put, that is, its current relevance, and the nature of students undertaking the course are taken into account (Lawton, 1983:19).

Another difficulty with the liberal-humanist tradition is that its elitism runs counter to democratic ideals of social justice and equality of opportunity (Lawton, 1983:7). In classical times, the laborious task of copying texts by hand, the specialist nature of literary skills in the division of labour and the value of access to written records for political and economic control of society could be expected to have influenced patterns of knowledge control associated with classical education. For Plato (427-347 B.C.), the education of a ruling elite was important for the preservation and transmission of an accumulated cultural heritage (Lawton, 1983:5). In the present age, blatant stratification is less acceptable. Nevertheless, the idea of an educated elite

and education stratified according to social class has survived through the centuries, in notions such as Renaissance man, public schooling and educated, Christian gentlemen, to the present day (Lawton, 1975:7). Bantock is a prominent, modern proponent of education stratified on the basis of class (Lawton, 1983:6).

Other difficulties are epistemological. Theories proposing discrete types of knowledge are at odds with conceptions of knowledge as a unitary entity. This debate about the singularity of knowledge is relevant to the epistemology underpinning the study and is considered in the following chapter.

Despite these criticisms, the liberal-humanist tradition remains a significant influence on modern curricula (Skilbeck and Cotter, 1988:139). For example, consideration of content still plays a major role in contemporary, curriculum development (Hirst and Peters, 1970:69; Skilbeck and Cotter, 1988:139). Aiming at wisdom and freedom from dogmatism is still considered a valuable goal (Cooper, 1993:34) and theorising about distinct, fundamental forms of knowledge remains topical (e.g. Habermas, 1978:311; Hirst, 1974). The liberal-humanist tradition exerts its influence both through adherence to its philosophical position but also through historical residues in educational practice.

With respect to its relevance for this study of open learning, this tradition has value as an existing influence on contemporary curricula and as the historical archetype of modern curricula. However, beyond contributing to the knowledge base of the study in this way and setting wisdom as an ideal, the tradition has little potential as a means of interpreting open learning because it is essentially theory **for**, rather than **about** curriculum.

Skilbeck and Cotter (1988:139) see the work of educational reformers since Comenius (1592-1670) as challenging the domination of subject matter to advocate curriculum built from the needs of students and society. This has sparked alternative traditions of curriculum theorising. A focus on the efficiency of education represents the technocratic tradition while theorising from a cultural perspective represents the anthropological-relativist tradition.

2.2.2 The technocratic tradition

In the present century, scientific modes of rationality have been directed towards a means-ends model of curriculum design in a tradition which Golby (1988:153) refers to as technocratic. Technical control of the educational process is the focus of this tradition (e.g. Kliebard, 1975:67 cited in Smith, D., 1983a:26). Teaching activities are regarded as technologies based on explicit knowledge and principles (House, 1979:147) to be analysed and manipulated for the achievement of pre-determined outcomes (Golby, 1988:153). In similar fashion, the goals of education or its intended outcomes, are either regarded as unproblematic (Eisner and Vallance, 1965:7; Golby, 1988:153) or definable through rational means such as job and task analysis or the collation of expert opinion (e.g. Charters, 1923:45-46).

The technocratic tradition encompasses Taylorism and the scientific management of education, as well as movements for educational efficiency such as the objectives movement pioneered by Bobbitt and Charters early this century and revived mid-century by Tyler and Mager (Eraut, 1985:3619-3620; Golby, 1988:153). Trends towards competency-based curriculum development, corporate managerialism and economic rationalism all appear to continue this tradition and Apple (1982:140-152) has expressed concern that the use of technical controls in education is increasing.

Apple (1982:140-153) viewed the use of pre-packaged curricula as a technocratic development. He suggested that the use of such packages in the school context means that control of curriculum is shifted, in the interests of efficiency, from the classroom to curriculum workers external to it through pre-specification of content, learning processes and evaluation. In a similar way, individualised, learning packages control the process and product of students' learning activities. As the use of such packages is common in open learning programs, it is possible that open learning is a further reflection of the technocratic tradition.

A significant critique of the technocratic approach as a theory **for** curriculum formation has been mounted on a number of grounds. On the basis of understandings derived from the 'new philosophy of science' (see Chapter 2), technocratic assumptions that objectives determination is value free and apolitical are no longer tenable (Golby, 1988:153; Phillips, 1983; Reid, W., 1978:59). Thus, technocratic methods are inadequate as a total solution to curriculum design for, as Charters (1923:43) recognised, "ideals are fluid and cannot be scientifically evaluated". It would seem that the benefits of applying scientific method to curriculum planning have finite limits.

Additional criticism of this tradition by, for example, Stenhouse (1971), Eisner (1969 cited in Golby, 1988:153), Lawton (1983:19-23) and R. Peters (1966:30,46) argues that process is as important as ends, that not all valuable, educational objectives are amenable to description in terms of measurable performance, and that unintentional educational outcomes and the nature of disciplines need to be taken into account (Golby, 1988:153). It has also been argued that focussing on skills and efficiency de-politicises educational issues and has the effect of reducing contestation over educational issues and legitimising the authority of the state (Apple, 1982:151).

The conspicuous failure of technocratic methods employed for educational innovation in the cold war era appears to have aided the critique of technocratic methods, exacerbated existing fractures between educational theory and its practice and strengthened the call for research from the practitioner's perspective (e.g. House, 1979:138; Skilbeck and Cotter, 1988:142,145; Smith, D., 1983a:19). An increasing number of projects grounded in teaching and learning activities has begun to develop theoretical knowledge from practice, to consider education within its cultural context and develop new ways of improving practice consistent with these understandings.

As was the case for the liberal-humanist tradition, the value of the technocratic tradition for the study appears to lie in its past and present influence on curriculum formation and this has relevance for open learning as a particular curricular form. The two traditions discussed thus far are essentially theories **for** curriculum development. As such, they represent a resource which may be useful in accounting for existing curricular forms. The anthropological-relativist tradition, on the other hand, is not limited to theory informing curriculum formation since it also provides a means of explaining or accounting for curriculum phenomena. This tradition extends beyond theory **for** curriculum development to encompass theory **about** curriculum phenomena. For this reason, it is the approach most appropriate to this study.

2.2.3 The anthropological-relativist tradition

Much of the credit for redefining curriculum away from a disciplinary focus and towards a cultural one has been attributed to John Dewey (1859-1952) (Skilbeck and Cotter, 1988:139). Dewey (1963:89) did not define curricula in terms of prescribed content but rather in terms of students' total, educational experiences. His argument was that learning experiences and planned curricula are two sides of the one coin. Dewey considered curriculum to include incidental learnings as well as intended ends, and learning processes as well as outcomes (Knowles, 1990:88; Skilbeck and Cotter, 1988:142). The notion of the hidden curriculum which refers to incidental learnings often related to social class (e.g. Mifflen and Mifflen, 1982:129) is part of Dewey's legacy as are experiential pedagogies such as discovery learning, project method, problem solving and integrated curriculum.

Dewey acknowledged education to be a socialising institution and curriculum to be a cultural artefact (Golby, 1988:157). From this perspective, the content, nature and mechanisms of education are explicitly regarded as linked to social purposes, educational beliefs and values. Dewey advocated reforms which would make education more student and society centred. He (Dewey, 1976) recognised conflicts between the interests of the child and those of the discipline and between instructional guidance and control, and the freedom and initiative of the child. Whereas a curriculum focus on content emphasises the transmission of an accumulated cultural heritage, a cultural orientation to curriculum emphasises the role of education in both reproducing and transforming the culture in which it is embedded (e.g. Apple, 1980; Kemmis and Fitzclarence, 1986:92). Efforts at social reconstruction through educational reform fall within this tradition as do studies on the sociology of knowledge and the politics of curriculum control.

In the anthropological-relativist tradition, knowledge of contextual realities is considered essential for national and school-level, educational planning (Skilbeck and Cotter, 1988:137). Curriculum formation from this perspective hinges upon cultural analysis since curriculum is seen as reflective and productive of culture. Proponents of this approach include Lawton, Stenhouse and Skilbeck as well as Dewey (Golby, 1988:157). Foci of concern are the needs of learners and the needs of society for productive and knowledgeable citizens (Golby, 1988:139). It could be that conceptions of open learning in terms of meeting learners' needs (e.g. Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training [SCEET], 1989) reflect this tradition.

Since not all social learning occurs in specialised, teaching contexts, curriculum formation necessarily involves a selection from culture (Lawton, 1975:6). This selection is made according to the interests and values of those responsible for this function and opens the possibility that particular social groups are able to define what counts as formal knowledge and who should have access to it (Young, 1971:32). Bernstein (1974:85) noted that the way "a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control." Typically, as sociologists such as Marx and Mannheim have stressed, the interests dominating curriculum formation have been those of the ruling classes (Lawton, 1975:54). Despite this control of curriculum, significant resistances to these dominant interests are also apparent (Apple, 1980). Curriculum control is, thus, an area of social contestation identified through the anthropological-relativist tradition.

This tradition accepts the cultural and historical relativity of curriculum and the political nature of its formation. This outlook has been pressed into service as a way of accounting for particular curricular forms and this provides a useful approach to the task of reassessing the meaning of open learning. The tradition offers both its socio-historic perspective and specific theory on curriculum control. While none of this theory is specific to open learning, it offers a broad template of understanding which may be applied to open learning as well as specific concepts useful in an analysis of curriculum control. These are incorporated into the conceptual framework as analytical tools.

It is worth noting in passing that the anthropological-relativist tradition is not homogeneous. Alternative perspectives, continue to create tension within it. For example, debate continues over the appropriate placement of emphasis, for curriculum development, on society or the individual (Chaplin, 1977:3205) and over the components of a worthwhile education. There is also variance between theorists of a deterministic ilk who maintain change is attributable largely to socio-cultural necessity and directed by established philosophy (e.g. Bowles and Gintis, 1976:16) and others who place greater emphasis on the potential for human action to influence social directions (e.g. Apple, 1980; Kemmis and Fitzclarence, 1986:92).

2.2.4 Open learning, curriculum control and the traditions

It is apparent that conceptions of curriculum vary. Nevertheless, there is a degree of overlap between the three traditions. For example, consideration of context figures in both the anthropological-relativist and the technocratic traditions and there are theorists, such as Bruner (1966:40), who combine elements of all three. It is also apparent that curriculum development is an area of contestation. While technocratic methods may streamline planning and provide important data for decision-making, and while analysis of knowledge, in the liberal-humanist tradition, may contribute to effective teaching methods, neither can substitute for human judgement in assessing values and weighing the worth of alternative possible courses of action in complex, social situations. Similarly, neither can remove political influences from educational planning and decision-making. Thus, curriculum development would seem to remain, in Aristotelian terms, a deliberative, or decision-making, activity inextricably associated with value judgements and linked to broader, social activities and aspirations (Reid, W., 1978:41, 1981:161-182; Schwab, 1969). It would also seem to remain a political activity in which alternative interests compete for direction and control (e.g. Apple, 1982:156).

For the purposes of this study, open learning has been aligned with the field of curriculum control. When this is considered within a decision-making context, what is significant is the locus of decision-making in open learning, the nature of decisions taken at different levels of the educational hierarchy and the manner in which decisions are determined. Each of the three traditions has relevance for curriculum control although this is not explicit in every case. In the liberal-humanist tradition, it is implicitly accepted that control is exercised through the academic discipline (Bernstein, 1974:82). In the technocratic tradition, control is the central, practical concern (e.g. Kliebard, 1975:67 cited in Smith, D., 1983a:26) although this is generally euphemised in terms of educational efficiency. In the anthropological-relativist tradition, curriculum control is a matter of responsiveness to social and cultural pressures and a matter of politics.

In the first two traditions, curriculum control is embedded within the philosophy of the tradition as a practical interest centred on curriculum outcomes and processes. Only in the third tradition are mechanisms of curriculum control, themselves, subjected to analysis and therein lies the particular value of this tradition for this study. Both the perspective and the content of this tradition are relevant to understanding open learning. On the one hand, the cultural perspective of this tradition can assist in analysing and accounting for the curricular patterns observed in open learning. On the other hand, the tradition offers theories of curriculum control relevant to the study. The benefit of the cultural perspective lies in facilitating understanding of the origins of social phenomena and "why we have these particular structures, arrangements, procedures, processes and no other" (Simon, B., 1983:66). It is accepted that to understand the present we must study the past.

At the same time, it is recognised, as Pinar (1978:211) suggests, that alternative traditions may each have a role to play and be useful for different functions and purposes. In this case, the three traditions summarise current philosophies and practices contributing to curriculum development and these may also be evident in open learning either separately or in combination.

The lack of definitive theory on both open learning and curriculum suggests the need for a multi-dimensional approach to the study which is sensitive to alternative conceptions. The framework for analysis developed in the following section provides a means of synthesising multiple, relevant perspectives on open learning. It is developed through identification of areas of tension between the curriculum traditions outlined above and also between alternative conceptions of open learning.

The framework is essentially a design for the research incorporating specific, prior theory as well as method. The rationale for basing the work upon prior theory rather than adopting a more inductive approach, such as grounded theory, is deferred to the following chapter to be discussed in conjunction with the methodology.

2.3 The conceptual framework for analysis

There are several, identifiable areas in which tension between opposing conceptions of both curriculum and open learning is concentrated. These provide a basis from which to develop the framework for analysis. While it is acknowledged that focussing on differences may highlight fractures rather than promote the kind of resynthesis Dewey (1976:273) advocated, this is justified as a means of recognising and organising the dimensions in dispute. In particular, tension is noted between:

- definitions of open learning and examples of open learning provision,
- educational theory and its actual practice, particularly in relation to open learning,
- discipline-centred and student or society-centred patterns of curriculum organisation,
- intended curriculum outcomes and actual student experiences, and
- curriculum as a fixed or relative social structure.

Although these differences are expressed as opposing dualisms, this is for the purpose of emphasis rather than to imply a rigid separation of alternative views. In reality, an intermingling of ideas might be expected.

From these dimensions of tension, alternative ways of considering open learning as well as a means of integrating these are distilled in the framework for analysis. This is constituted of three main elements. Element 1 concerns the focus of the study and concerns a set of three alternative, curriculum conceptions of open learning. These are essentially alternative perspectives on open learning. They are applied, in this study, to the case of the Australian OLI as a source of evidence for theoretical interpretation. Element 2 is the process or methodology employed to generate each of these conceptions and then integrate them in an interpretation of open learning. Element 3 comprises a suite of specific concepts and related theory useful as analytical tools in generating new meaning for open learning. Each of the three elements is discussed in turn below. Their integration as a complete framework is discussed in association with Element 2.

2.3.1 Element 1 of the framework

Element 1 of the framework for analysis provides three alternative ways of looking at open learning, that is, three alternative perspectives. These are called curriculum conceptions of open learning since they reflect the dimensions of tension in curriculum theory identified above. It is as though open learning is being examined from three different vantage points. The curriculum conceptions generated from these vantage points provide a range of evidence for analysis and interpretation. Specifically, open learning is considered as:

- **an element of social theory and philosophy**,
- **an intended curriculum**, and
- **a perceived student learning experience**.

It is recognised that these three conceptions do not exhaust the possible ways of considering open learning. Additional ways, for example, as an actual curriculum perceived by providers, were also identified. However, constraints of time and resourcing necessitated limiting the study to the three listed above. It is also recognised that these curriculum conceptions do not, in themselves, cover all the dimensions of tensions noted. However, the tensions between conceptions of curriculum as a fixed or relative structure and those between discipline-centred and culturally-oriented curricula are taken into account in the overall interpretation as part of Element 2.

The curriculum conceptions of open learning comprising Element 1 of the framework are reported in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of the thesis. More specifically, Chapter 4 reviews the theory and philosophy of open learning, Chapter 5 analyses the intended curriculum of the OLI while Chapter 6 reports on the curriculum experienced by students undertaking that program. While the theoretical conception applies generally to open learning programs, the evidence of curriculum intention and student experience is drawn from the OLI as a particular case. It is appropriate to defer consideration of the nature of theory, philosophy and intended curriculum to the relevant chapters, however, further elaboration of the approach taken on the student perspective is necessary, at this stage, as a prelude to the methodology.

With respect to investigating open learning as a perceived student learning experience, the study casts learners in the role of **curriculum decision-makers**. The rationale for this derives from the implication, highlighted in Chapter 1, that open learning involves a transfer of control of curriculum decisions to learners. This approach is consistent with understandings of curriculum formation as a deliberative process and draws a parallel with recent research which views teachers as policy and decision-makers rather than, simply, syllabus implementors (e.g. Bennett, 1991; Calderhead, 1981; Hannay and Seller, 1990; Smith, D., 1983a; Smith, D., and Lovat, 1990).

Considering learners as curriculum decision-makers and agents of curriculum control is a novel approach for an empirical study[3]. This, in itself, would seem to indicate a widespread assumption that curriculum decisions are not the prerogative of students. Suggestions that open learning systems transfer control of curriculum to learners are at odds with such an assumption. In one sense, the thesis treats this matter as an hypothesis and puts it to the test. In another sense, this analogy to quantitative method is inappropriate because the thesis does not confine itself to adjudicating this issue but remains receptive to alternative explanations.

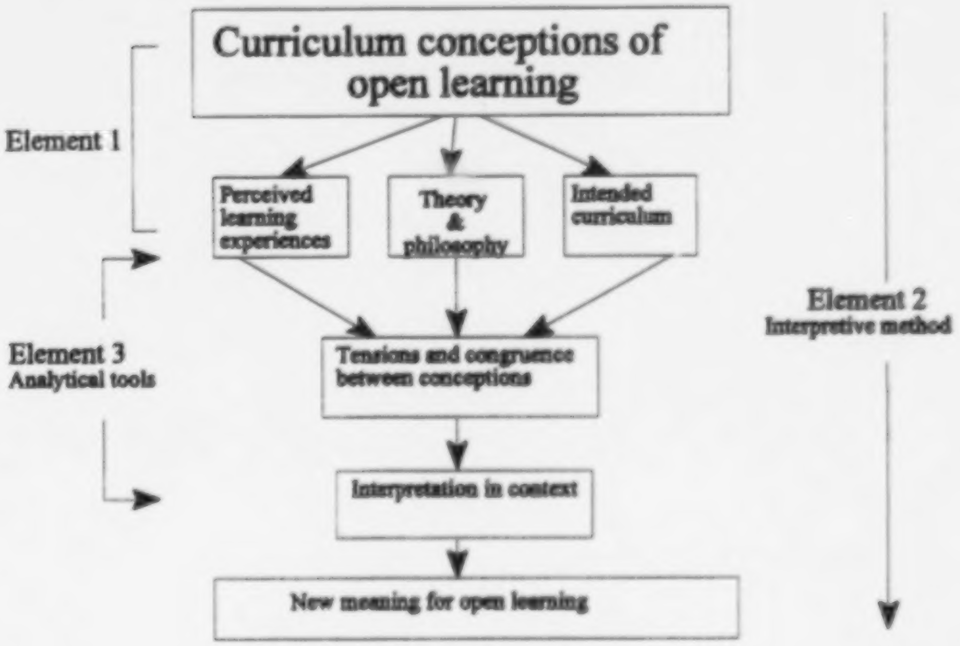
While Element 1 provides **foci** for the analysis, there remains a need for **means** of generating these conceptions of open learning and means of synthesising an overall understanding. The second and third elements of the framework address means.

2.3.2 Element 2 of the framework

Element 2 is essentially the **methodology of the study** and this is the focus of Chapter 3. However, in order to clarify the role of this element in relation to the total framework, a brief overview is appropriate at this stage. The general process followed in conducting the study is shown in Figure 1. This, in effect, summarises the entire framework.

Figure 1

Conceptual framework for the analysis of open learning


Curriculum conceptions of open learning
Element 1
Perceived learning experiences
Theory & philosophy
Intended curriculum
Element 2
Interpretive method
Element 3
Analytical tools
Tensions and congruence between conceptions
Interpretation in context
New meaning for open learning

The methodology of the study is noteworthy in being multi-faceted. It includes the specific methodologies employed for generating each of the three curriculum conceptions enlisted for Element 1 as well as the means of combining this evidence in an overall interpretation. The former requires methods appropriate in each case and these are described in Chapter 3. The overall interpretation involves examining the alternative conceptions of open learning, thus generated, for points of tension and congruence and then submitting the whole of the evidence to interpretation in terms of the relevant context. This involves assessing the relevance of existing theory for the case of the OLI and seeking the significance of open learning in its cultural and historical context. Through this combination of methods, the evidence of theory, intention, student experience and context is synthesised into an interpretation of open learning which is, itself, a curriculum conception of open learning.

Specific concepts useful in this process are compiled as a suite of analytical tools in Element 3 of the framework for analysis.

2.3.3 Element 3 of the framework

The concepts and theory selected for the suite of analytical tools are suited to an investigation of curriculum control and decision-making. While the individual items are drawn from separate bodies of research and theorising, they are integrated as a package applicable across all the levels of educational decision-making and control encompassed by the study. The specific concepts employed are:

- **curriculum codes**,
- **frames** and
- **perceived curriculum decision-making space** which, for brevity, is also referred to as decision-making space.

Because of their nature and disparate origins, the concepts comprising the package are not equally appropriate to every aspect of the analysis. Curriculum codes are valuable for interpreting open learning in relation to its context and are, thus, most relevant to the overall interpretation. Frames and decision-making space are useful for analysing particular instances of decision-making within a given context. They are applied, in this work, primarily to students' experiences of decision-making in open learning.

At this point in the discussion, the general form of the conceptual framework is complete. As much as is needed, at this stage, on Elements 1 and 2 has been discussed. It remains to elaborate the suite of analytical tools in more detail. This is undertaken in the following, concluding section of the chapter. The discussion is organised around two distinct, but mutually reinforcing, levels of educational decision-making and control: a socio-cultural level of control and an administrative level of control. The study needs to encompass both of these since decisions are taken within both administrative and socio-cultural contexts. The suite of analytical tools combines concepts applicable to each of these levels.

2.4 Analytical tools

At the socio-cultural level, curriculum control has been studied in terms of the relation of curriculum to society (e.g. Apple, 1982; Bernstein, 1974; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Lundgren, 1983, 1991; Young, 1971). At this level, curriculum is influenced through socio-cultural mechanisms implicit in educational philosophies, established policies and traditions. At the same time, this level incorporates material conditions and social circumstances which shape curriculum possibilities (e.g. Lundgren, 1983). These influences are so much a part of everyday reality that their role in controlling curriculum may go unrecognised. Nevertheless, their influence is no less significant for its hidden nature.

It is from studies of this taken-for-granted cultural level, that the study draws the concepts and theory of curriculum codes proposed by Lundgren (1983:13-35, 1991:5) and Bernstein (1974:85-113, 1977). Considerable attention is given to curriculum code theory, or simply code theory, as this provides an historical model of changing patterns of curriculum control which is central to the interpretation of open learning suggested by this thesis. Code theory, Lundgren's more so than Bernstein's, reflects the anthropological-relativist tradition in its explanation of curriculum control in terms of its socio-historical context. Indeed, the use of the codes proposed by Lundgren automatically implies such a perspective because the definition of individual codes incorporates contextual changes associated with the progress of time.

The second level at which curriculum control has been studied focuses on educational administration and curriculum decision-making. Within the context established by controls at the socio-cultural level, administrative controls are embedded in educational structures and procedures, curriculum policies and practices. Relevant work at this level includes research which lacks a knowing focus on curriculum control, such as research on teachers' decision-making (e.g. Smith, D., 1983a; Smith, D., and Lovat, 1990), as well as studies with this explicit intent (e.g. Bernstein, 1974:9; Kallos and Lundgren, 1979a, 1979b; Lawton, 1983:115-135).

From the administrative level, the study draws the concepts of frame and perceived decision-making space. The frame concept is in need of clarification for its present use as it has been used previously in a variety of ways (e.g. Bernstein, 1974:97-99, 1977:531; Dahllöf, 1971:75; Kallos and Lundgren, 1979a:24-30, 1979b:107; Lundgren, 1972:40-43; Smith, D., 1983a:233-246; Smith, D., and Lovat, 1990:109). The concept of perceived curriculum decision-making space was proposed by D. Smith (1983a:233, 1983b) and although Smith's conception is adopted, there is a need to clarify its definition for the study.

Although the concepts in the suite are drawn from prior research, their assemblage as a multi-faceted instrument for the analysis of curriculum control is an outcome of this study. Taken together, the suite of tools is expected to be sensitive to a wide variety of influences and comprehensive in covering both socio-cultural and administrative levels of control. It should also be generally applicable to further, similar investigations of curriculum control. The description and definition of the various components of the suite of analytical tools as employed in this project occupies most of the remainder of the chapter.

2.4.1 Curriculum codes

In essence, curriculum codes summarise the principles underpinning curriculum development in a particular culture at a particular time. Two authors have proposed such codes. The first to do so was Bernstein (1974:85) who proposed interpreting patterns of curriculum control in terms of codes he called **educational knowledge codes**. These were defined as the underlying principles which shape curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation. These regulative principles were conceived by Bernstein (1974:180) as being tacitly acquired and integrating relevant meanings, the form of their realisation and their evoking contexts. While making no reference to Bernstein's earlier educational knowledge codes, Lundgren (1983:14-16) also proposed a code concept in his **curriculum codes**. These were defined as summarising the complex assemblage of influences shaping curriculum selection, organisation and transmission.

While both types of code are defined similarly, curriculum codes have greater historical sensitivity and incorporate a wider variety of contextual influences on curriculum. They include social circumstances and material conditions as well as philosophical and epistemological influences. In comparison, educational knowledge codes appear to focus more narrowly on the educational principles informing curriculum control and on patterns of organising subject matter and methods of instruction. Both kinds of code represent complex and multi-faceted social forces steering curriculum decision-making. For brevity, both are referred to as curriculum codes or simply, codes, in the remainder of the thesis. They are differentiated either by author or sub-type as elaborated below.

One criticism of the use of curriculum codes is that, as in any categorisation, attention is drawn to the similarities which define each code and make it distinct, rather than to differences which may exist within it (Kemmis, 8.6.94, pers. com.). This has the potential to create an appearance of uniformity which may disguise tensions and competing movements within a code. On the other hand, the benefit of using codes lies in their ability to summarise and interpret broad patterns and to highlight and explain trends. For this purpose, curriculum codes are useful in this study. At the same time, it is recognised that since codes are gross categorisations, they are likely to err in oversimplifying the complexities of the situation.

Kemmis and Fitzclarence (1986:28-32), although including Lundgren's curriculum code theory in their own teaching, have pointed to a need for its further validation. Applying codes in this study contributes to this process since the broad fit of the theory at the level of tertiary education comes under scrutiny.

Bernstein (1974) proposed and elaborated two basic types of code which he called the collection code and the integrated code. Under a collection code, knowledge is organised into separate disciplines and subjects are tightly insulated and separated from each other. In this code, knowledge partakes of the sacred endowing its possessors with status and is seen, not so much as an individual's right, but rather as something to be earned through discipline. Curriculum control under the collection code is regulated by the academic discipline as monitored and administered by the established, educational hierarchy. In the social order of teaching under this code, students have few rights. While teachers may have considerable latitude to regulate instruction, student learning is dictated by the established knowledge form under the control and surveillance of the teacher.

Under an integrated code, on the other hand, subject matter is gathered across traditional disciplinary boundaries in accordance with some organising theme or purpose. The various contents are subordinate to some overarching, integrating purpose and less isolated from each other. Under this code, greater attention is paid to the educational purpose informing instruction so that the status of individual disciplines is reduced. Curiously, in an integrated curriculum, while students have more freedom and control over their learning, the activities of teachers tend to be more highly specified.

In effect, Bernstein's collection and integrated codes mirror patterns of curriculum control seen in the liberal-humanist and cultural traditions, respectively. Bernstein (1974:5,101) suggested that in moving from collection to integrated curricula there was a power shift from adults to peers. By this, he was implying a transfer of curriculum control from teachers and the academic discipline to students. He saw this shift as a mechanism of social control.

Bernstein's code theory has been criticised for, amongst other things[4], neglecting the intrinsic logic of subjects in proposing an integrated code (Gibson, 1977:35). However, the existence of curricula consistent with this code (Bradbury, 1990:231) and its independent identification in the guise of the cultural tradition and certain types of code proposed by Lundgren (1983:16-34), refutes this criticism.

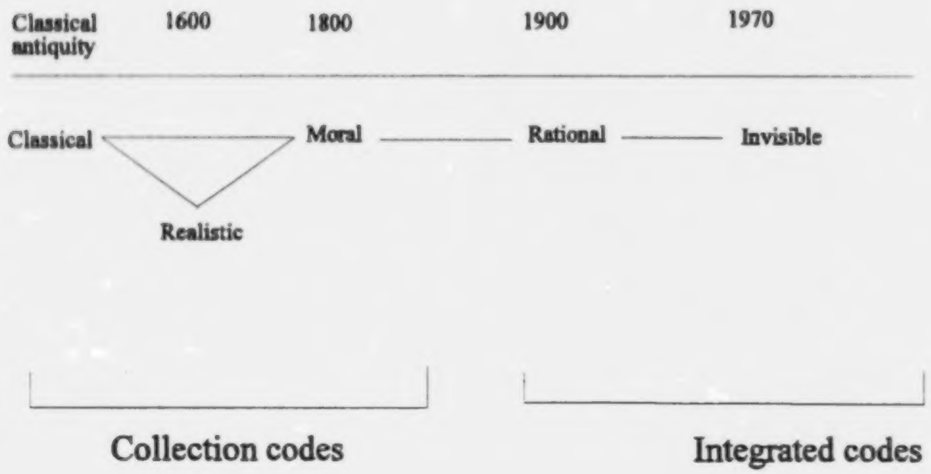
Lundgren (1983:16-35, 1991:14-36) proposed an historical sequence of five curriculum codes. The specific codes he proposed are the classical, the realistic, the moral, the rational and the invisible curriculum codes. These trace changing principles informing curriculum formation from those shaping the educational system of the ancient Greeks to those influencing curricula of the present day. Because a residue from previous codes is retained in subsequent codes, it is necessary to briefly outline all five of these codes in order to understand the present position. The codes form an historical succession which incorporates changes in epistemology, philosophy, social circumstances and educational practice which have affected curriculum over the past two thousand years. This succession of codes provides a descriptive model of historical changes in curriculum control which can be used in interpreting open learning. The model is primarily concerned with the culture and curriculum of Western societies and generally accords with histories of education such as those of Boyd and King (1975) and Bowen (1972).

It is possible to integrate the codes proposed by Lundgren with those of Bernstein because the classical, realistic and moral codes are all collection codes while the rational and the invisible codes are integrated codes. Figure 2 expresses this relationship diagrammatically. It also indicates, by means of a time line, the time frames Lundgren (1983:15,34) suggests for the operation of specific codes. In effect, the figure depicts an historical model of curriculum history in terms of curriculum codes. An abbreviated account of each of these codes follows.

While Lundgren's original description of the codes explains changes in context and curriculum in some detail, this is superfluous to the present application and is therefore treated only briefly. The following account draws faithfully on Lundgren's

Figure 2

Model of curriculum history in terms of curriculum codes



(1983:16-35, 1991:14-36) original works with three exceptions. It includes an interpretation of the codes in terms of the curriculum traditions outlined earlier, it synthesises the code concepts used by Bernstein and Lundgren as indicated above and it incorporates statements supportive of the trends and principles described by code theory from additional sources. In order to avoid repeated reference to the same source, only acknowledgments additional to Lundgren's contribution are included. To some extent, information already introduced in discussing curriculum traditions is repeated in what follows. While efforts were made to keep overlaps to a minimum, those remaining are seen as validating evidence for the curriculum patterns described by curriculum code theory.

The **classical code** represents the archetype of the liberal-humanist tradition and encapsulates principles of curriculum development originating with the ancient Greeks. It is a collection code in which disciplinary boundaries are strong. The main organising principle of this code is the structuring of subjects in order to sharpen the intellect in the search for eternal truth. In classical education, knowledge was considered a pre-established 'given', an inheritance from antiquity or from God (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:14). Only deductive reasoning from established truth was an admissible path to wisdom. Classical education stressed the attainment of wisdom rather than utilitarian advantage (Domonkos, 1977:2022). Thus the classical code organises learning into distinct disciplines with the aim of cultivating balanced persons in terms of the intellect, aesthetics and moral values.

The **realistic code** developed following changes in epistemology and context as it was realised that knowledge could be discovered by observation and through inductive reasoning. Under this code, a product of humanism, realism, the Reformation and the Age of Enlightenment, education became more relevant to the needs of contemporary society with the study of natural philosophy. The number of subjects in the curriculum was expanded but the organisational pattern and principles of control retained their earlier form. According to Lundgren, this shift began with advocates such as Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), Francis Bacon (1561-1626), John Milton (1608-1674) and John Locke (1632-1704) but became evident in curriculum with the reforms of Johann Comenius (1592-1670). The change was seen, initially, in the introduction of practical studies such as languages, economics and politics. These changes in curriculum which Lundgren (1983:20-23) identifies with the realistic code have also been noted by Brubacher and Rudy (1968:14-15).

The industrial revolution fanned interest in the natural and practical sciences and was associated with the introduction of new fields of education such as engineering and administration. The printing press which had been invented much earlier but which was mechanised at this time also precipitated far reaching changes affecting education (Bowen, 1972:259). The widespread availability of books (Johnson, 1968:13) revolutionised access to knowledge in much the same way that writing and specialised systems of education had done much earlier. In association with Luther's (1483-1546) reformed philosophy emphasising each individual's interpretation of God's Word (Chaplin, 1977:3209), the text, rather than its guardians, became the authority of knowledge until this too was challenged by the scientific spirit.

With the secularisation of teaching and the growth of scientific thinking, post-Enlightenment curricula came to be seen as a selection from culture which could be applied to the advancement of society (Hamilton, 1990:38).

The **moral code** which developed later and co-existed with the realistic code was, essentially, a response to the social chaos and class struggles accompanying the industrial revolution and was associated with the introduction of compulsory schooling. The movement for compulsory, mass education arose initially for bible study and was later concerned with training productive and loyal citizens in nationally constructed, political states (Sadnytzky and Bereday, 1977:2763). The organising principles of this code were moral with the goal of inculcating the values of responsible citizenship in an era of expanding rights of suffrage and social upheaval. Values of self-discipline and internalised control were promulgated (Bowles and Gintis, 1976:170). The curricula propounded by Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) and Thomas Arnold (1795-1842) are noteworthy examples of the principles of the moral code (see e.g. Boyd and King, 1975:334-382).

The **rational code** began to develop around the turn of the twentieth century. At this time, there was a major transformation in ideas about curriculum formation which saw attention focus on learners more than knowledge (Hamilton, 1990:39). The rational code accompanied the rise of democratic ideals of individual freedom and the implementation of mass schooling. It came to the fore at a time when education was seen as an instrument of social change and national governments were taking increasing control of social policy important for economic and national development.

Under the influence of the organising principles of the rational curriculum code, educational policy and practice were organised along increasingly realistic lines as applied sciences in which demand analyses became the basis for selection of knowledge for inclusion in curricula, experimental methods were used to improve learning and teaching, and psychological methods were employed to improve education as well as implement and legitimate education's growing role in the sorting and differentiation of labour. This code, essentially, supported the expansion of schooling and its integration with the needs of the state and the economy (Kemmis and Fitzclarence, 1986:31). It was a complex of pragmatism, democratic idealism, individualism and rational, scientific thinking.

Pragmatism led to the selection of curriculum content on the basis of the knowledge needed for social life. Democratic ideals stressed education as a basic human right. Individualism stressed the need to suit curriculum to learners and the need for learners to shoulder more responsibility in the learning process (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:272). Scientific rationality and the discoveries of science contributed understandings of child development and built confidence in technocratic approaches to curriculum. The combination of these principles led to a more child and society-centred, progressive curriculum.

The rational code did not merely add new, practical subjects to the curriculum as the realistic code had done but stimulated a reformulation of knowledge and instruction according to these new principles of mass education. In this sense, this code represents the turning point from collection to integrated curricula.

Formal education under the classical code had not been a ubiquitous commodity but rather the privilege of an elite. Consequently, curriculum was not a major focus of government concern. In an increasingly differentiated and technology-based society, requiring basic education of an increasing proportion of its citizens, education took on the functions of qualifying and sorting labour power. Mass, free, compulsory, state-sponsored education created the need for state concern about the nature of curricula. Coupled with scientific rationality, this led to objectification of curriculum and the growth of curriculum studies. As a consequence, curriculum subsequently came to be controlled, not merely through the prescription of texts, syllabi and evaluation as it was under the rational code, but also through the socialisation of teachers and the sponsorship of research.

The objectivity of scientific method which this entails has had the effect of creating an illusion of neutrality and this obscures the political nature of many, major decisions affecting schools and curriculum (Kemmis and Fitzclarence, 1986:80; Lundgren, 1983:50-52). For example, research is used to evaluate, legitimate and further refine directions already decided rather than to elaborate or evaluate alternative courses of action or to question the educational system itself. In a similar manner, the bureaucratisation of educational systems has encouraged a reification of state control such that its power seems beyond challenge (Kemmis and Fitzclarence, 1986:80). These changes in the manner in which curriculum is controlled constituted a further step in the historical progression to a hidden mechanism of control. These principles of curriculum development are encapsulated in the **invisible curriculum code**.

Given that people are rational, moral agents, it follows that decision-makers act in accordance with their individual knowledge and beliefs (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975:14). While code theory summarises past and present philosophical and contextual influences on curriculum in a general way, the frame and decision-making space concepts enable consideration of curriculum decision-making in an operative way. These concepts facilitate analysis of the options, constraints and desiderata of particular decisions as well as analysis of educational control structures.

2.4.2 Frames and perceived decision-making space

The totality of options and possible courses of action perceived by a decision-maker in a particular educational, decision situation is taken to define their curriculum decision-making space. D. Smith (1983a:181, 1983b) proposed this concept to analyse teachers' curriculum decision-making, however, it is applied, in this instance, to students and could equally be applied to educational administrators.

There are several additional points which need to be made to clarify the definition of this concept for this study. The first point to note is that the term, action, refers not only to observable behaviours but also to mental responses such as deciding on intended behaviours, forming an opinion or taking a moral position. The second point to note is that the term, space, is used metaphorically so that no inference about the actual, neurophysical mechanisms involved in decision-making is intended. The final point, which has also been stressed by D. Smith (1983a:186, 1983b), is that decision-making space is necessarily perceptual since each individual's decisions are based upon his or her own, unique knowledge and understandings. As people may not be in possession of complete or accurate information, their perceptions do not necessarily correspond to the real[5] state of affairs. Similarly, different people may form different perceptions of a decision situation.

The frame concept has been used in several studies in the educational context but has not enjoyed constancy of definition (e.g. Bernstein, 1974:98; Dahllöff, 1971:75; Lundgren, 1972:27,40-43; Smith, D., 1983a:241,244; Smith, D., and Lovat, 1990:109). In all cases, it has the sense of a constraining influence but the specific meaning and terminology have varied. Dahllöff (1971:75) used the term, frame factors, to refer to determinants of the educational process but confined the concept to factors controlled by school authorities. Other factors in the teaching environment, which were also recognised as influences on teaching, were specifically excluded. Lundgren (1972:27,40-43), on the other hand, used the term, frame factors, more generally, to refer to factors from a variety of sources limiting the teaching process. He saw some frame factors as fixed, others as variable and capable of being manipulated.

Bernstein also used the concepts, frame and framing although somewhat ambiguously (Gibson, 1977). On the one hand, he used frames in the same sense as Lundgren (1972:27,40-43) to refer to controls, external to teacher and student, over the selection, organisation, pacing and timing of knowledge (Bernstein, 1974:98). Strong framing meant there was a high level of restriction over these activities. On the other hand, Bernstein (1974:88-89) used frames to refer to the "degree of control over curriculum available to teacher and pupil" and to the "range of options available to the teacher and the taught". In this latter sense, frames appear to be congruent with decision-making space as previously defined.

D. Smith (1983a:241,244) and D. Smith and Lovat (1990:109) considered frames in a decision-making context and defined them as the limits to teachers' options for curriculum decision-making. In this sense, frames refer to the boundaries which prescribe or circumscribe decision-making space setting the degrees of freedom available to the teacher decision-maker (Smith, D. 1983a:239,241). For these authors, frames were conceptual groupings of frame factors (e.g. Smith, D. 1983a:243).

While Lundgren (1972:42) and Kallos and Lundgren (1979a:30) confined frames to tangible, substantive items, D. Smith (1983a:191) extended the concept to intangibles such as the decision-makers' knowledge and beliefs. Smith recognised frames on teachers' decision-making set through decisions already taken at higher levels of the educational hierarchy and others comprised of self-imposed limits. The latter were derived from the decision-makers' personal knowledge and belief and based on experience, values and preference. Frames of the self-imposed kind included the decision-makers' self-concept and self-efficacy and beliefs about students (Smith, D. 1983a:319,325,381; Smith, D., and Lovat, 1990:113-115).

The concept of frame adopted in this thesis is most closely akin to this latter description used by D. Smith (1983a:237) and D. Smith and Lovat (1990:109). Frames are used in the sense of determinants which set the boundaries or limits to a decision-maker's potential courses of action, options or decision-making space. However, as it stands there is one problem with this conception and this is that there is little to distinguish self-imposed frames from decision-making space. The difficulty is that self-imposed frames work to limit options through their effect of lowering the projected utility or feasibility of certain options. Self-imposed frames are not external controls in the sense of a decision taken elsewhere, but rather internally perceived limits which lead to the rejection or neglect of what might otherwise be potential options. A usage of the frame concept which includes self-imposed limits as frames is adopted in this thesis. However, a new definition is proposed to remedy this lack of conceptual clarity.

Thus, frames are defined for the purposes of this study as those things which set the boundaries or limits to a decision-makers' perceived options or which limit the perceived, overall utility of certain options sufficiently for them to be rendered impractical or unacceptable. The distinction between an impossible option and one that is simply not highly preferred is regarded as a matter of personal perception. Intangibles are included as potential frames. Thus, frames could include all types of knowledge, belief and values. They could, potentially, include philosophies, educational policies, decisions taken at higher levels of the educational hierarchy, material conditions and contextual events.

According to this definition of the frame concept, curriculum codes are a kind of frame because of their role in constraining and influencing curriculum decisions through cultural mechanisms. While codes and frames are abstractions, they summarise and represent significant aspects of education. Their use is a convenient way of describing and summarising curriculum patterns and trends.

As defined for this study, the frame and decision-making space concepts complement each other. Where frames focus on the constraining influences in a decision situation, the latter concept focuses on the remaining options and the decision-makers' latitude for discretion. Together, these concepts provide a means of analysing the degree of curriculum control available to students in open learning programs by helping to map the loci of decision-making on significant aspects of curriculum.

Frames have been described in terms of their strength (e.g. Bernstein, 1974:109), their substantive content or nature (e.g. Dahllöff, 1971:75-77; Lundgren, 1972:43; Smith, D., 1983a) and the levels at which they are instigated and/or operationalised within educational systems (e.g. Kallos and Lundgren, 1979a:24,29; Smith, D., 1983a:243; Smith, D., and Lovat, 1990:109[6]). It is this latter application, particularly, which facilitates analysis of curriculum control structures for "the level at which a frame is instituted, and the nature of decisions taken [at each level] may be regarded as overt expressions of the power structure of the state" (Kallos and Lundgren, 1979a:30-31).

In the present research, the frame and decision-making space concepts are applied to students' decision-making in open learning as a means of investigating the curriculum control afforded to learners. A more complete analysis of decision-making in open learning could be undertaken by applying these concepts to an extended range of decision-makers including curriculum developers, university providers, funding authorities and politicians. This would provide additional evidence on curriculum control patterns in the OLI. However, such an analysis was considered unnecessary for the needs of the study and beyond its resources in terms of both funding and time. An alternative source of information about curriculum control in the Initiative was accessed in the form of documentary evidence of established curriculum policy (the intended curriculum). This source indicated the types of decisions taken by the various, relevant, official authorities.

Since the concepts of frame and decision-making space are not known to have been applied to learners' curriculum decision-making previously, no specific frames on this were located. However, elements which can be conceptualised in terms of frames are suggested from studies in the field of learner control and these are discussed below. Research and theorising on learner control do not focus on open learning, or even on curriculum control, per se. Their focus is encouraging self-direction and autonomy whereby learners control and direct their own learning. This is not dissimilar to control-oriented notions of open learning and, for this reason, constraints on learner control may be applicable as frames on students' decision-making in open learning. However, because these ideas have been seconded from another area of research for a different purpose, they are regarded as tentative and in need of validation with reference to specific data. A similar proviso applies to the application of curriculum code theory to open learning.

The work of D. Garrison and Baynton (1987), D. Garrison, (1989:26-29) and Candy (1991:418-425) on learner control suggests three possible kinds of frames on learners' decision-making. Although the various authors have used different terminology, all identify influences on learner control relating to students' rights, students' competencies and the resources available to them[7].

Rights refers to "what is actually permitted" (Candy, 1991:420) or to students' freedom to make decisions concerning aspects of the learning process (Garrison, D., and Baynton, 1987). Rights also includes aspects of learning for which the student has responsibility. **Resources**, on the other hand, refers to the availability and accessibility of material and human learning resources and includes the support available both from the educational provider and other sources (Candy, 1991:419; Garrison, D., and Baynton, 1987). **Competencies** refers to personal abilities affecting learning and covers a broad range of technical, cognitive and affective competencies (Candy, 1991:418) influencing the learners' ability to take part in and assume responsibility for, the learning process (Garrison, D., and Baynton, 1987).

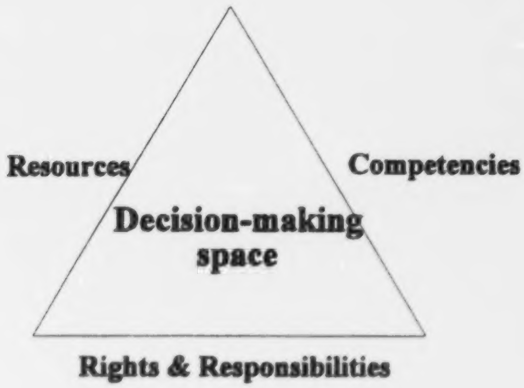
At this stage, each individual student's perceived curriculum decision-making space is conceived as a unique knowledge base containing available options which are framed by their perceptions of the limits of what they are capable of doing (frames to competence), the support and resources on hand which may limit their choices (framing resources) and features of the curriculum which are outside their right or responsibility to decide (frames on rights). In conjunction with cultural frames, such as curriculum codes, these constraining parameters are proposed as a set of frames around the curriculum options of a learner's decision-making space as shown in Figure 3. This is adapted from D. Garrison and Baynton (1987:5).

The data obtained on learners' experiences of decision-making in the OLI assist in validating or refuting this model and, in conjunction with the evidence of theory and intention, elucidate the curriculum control afforded learners in this Australian program. This will contribute to understanding the open learning phenomenon as outlined in the framework for analysis.

In concluding this chapter, a final note is needed on the use which has been made, or not made, of other research on decision-making.

Figure 3

Proposed frames on learners' curriculum decision-making space



2.4.3 Decision-making processes

There is a considerable body of theory and research on human decision-making (Heald, 1991) much of which has not been considered in developing this conceptual framework. This is because the current interest lies in the desiderata and limits to decision-making on open learning, that is, the content and constraints, rather than the decision-making process itself. Suffice it to say that a model of decision-making incorporating some notion of bounded rationality (Simon, H., 1957:204) and some idea of the probable outcome of a decision is assumed.

According to Radford (1989:1), decision-making involves "the formulation of alternative courses of action to meet a situation under consideration and...the choice between these alternatives after an evaluation of their effectiveness in achieving the decision-maker's objective or objectives". This definition reflects an economic and systems management approach to decision-making. In that context, the concept of the expected utility of the various alternative courses of action has been formulated. This concept incorporates the consequences of adopting a particular course of action, the probability that these consequences will result from the decision and an assessment of their relative worth (Wärrneryd, 1986).

However, the economic or systems management approach does not seem to accurately reflect the way people make decisions in their daily lives. People do not seem to make personal decisions in such a totally rational and quantifiable way. At best, they display what has been called bounded rationality which means that they make decisions within the limits of their cognition and make decisions which are good enough rather than optimal (Simon, H., 1957:204). They do this without perfect information on which to base their decisions, in an uncertain world (Biela, Chelwinski and Walesa, 1983:291; Radford, 1989:2) and without necessarily defining all possible options and analysing their relative, anticipated worth (Andersen, 1985). Choosing frequently involves subjective comparisons across innumerable, incommensurable dimensions. In complex decision situations, outcomes, both positive and negative, involve issues of human welfare and values which cannot be quantified. Research has indicated that decision-makers often use simplified representations of the decision problem and simplified strategies for choosing (Svenson, 1983:138). Decisions may be made when a solution which is good enough rather than maximally good is discovered (Simon, H., 1957:204). This is called satisficing. While such decision-making may not fit rational models, it is consistent with goal-directed action aimed at satisficing (Andersen, 1985:99).

For the present purpose, it is assumed that there is a finite number of perceived options in a given decision situation and that the decision context limits these options (Smith, D., 1983a:187,189). For learners in this study, these limits are conceived as frames while the options which remain constitute the learners' decision-making space.

2.5 Summary and conclusions

In this chapter, three traditions of curriculum theorising were reviewed and a tradition of value for interpreting open learning identified. This tradition, known as the anthropological-relativist tradition, stresses a socio-cultural orientation to curriculum. It offers a general orientation to investigating open learning as well as a body of theory on the control of curriculum. In line with the tenets of this tradition, open learning will be viewed as a cultural artefact explicable in relation to its socio-historic context. The alternative liberal-humanist and technocratic traditions provide relevant background on the history of curriculum and on contemporary approaches to curriculum development which may be influential in open learning.

A number of tensions between opposing conceptions of curriculum and open learning were identified and these informed development of a multi-dimensional framework for the analysis and interpretation of open learning. The framework for the analysis incorporates alternative perspectives on open learning and considers the student point of view. It comprises a set of vantage points from which to examine open learning, an interpretive method and a suite of concepts and theory to be used as analytical tools.

The vantage points also derive from the areas of tension identified. They provide foci for the analysis and generate three alternative curriculum conceptions of open learning from which new meaning can be synthesised. Specifically, the study will consider open learning as an element of social theory, as an intended curriculum and as a perceived, learning experience. Because open learning commonly implies transfer of control to learners, the experiences of students are examined from a decision-making perspective with learners considered in their role as curriculum decision-makers.

The interpretive method of the framework encompasses the means by which new meaning for open learning can be generated. Specific methods are required to generate each of the three curriculum conceptions of open learning and to synthesise an overall interpretation. In brief, the synthesis begins with an analysis of the congruence of the three conceptions of open learning, that is, with an assessment of the degree of fit between existing theory and the evidence of the OLI. It then proceeds through an analysis of the cultural and historic context relevant to both open learning and the OLI to generate an overall interpretation of the combined evidence.

A suite of analytical tools was designed to assist in this analysis and interpretation of open learning. It contains concepts and theory relevant to considering the control of curriculum at both a socio-cultural level and at an administrative level. For the analysis of patterns of curriculum control at the socio-cultural level, the suite employs the theory of curriculum codes. This provides a model of historical changes which have occurred in the way curriculum is organised and controlled and this is relevant to interpreting open learning in relation to its context. For analysis of administrative control in open learning, the suite contains the concepts of frame and decision-making space. These are used to examine students' latitude for control in the OLI.

Before reporting the implementation of this conceptual framework, it is necessary to detail the methodology of the study and orient this in terms of epistemology and ontology. This is the function of Chapter 3.

Endnotes

1. While earlier cultures had systems of higher education and studied a variety of topics (e.g. Domonkos, 1977:2017-21), the Greeks organised knowledge into distinct fields contained in written texts (Lundgren, 1983:16).

2. Watt and Goody (1963:320) also implicated the technology of writing in the development of rational-deductive forms of reasoning which are implicit in liberal-humanist curricula. Their argument was that since oral culture can, at times, be at odds with written records, this would stimulate the need for systems of thought for distinguishing truth from myth. Subsequent studies of the effects of literacy on cognitive thought have largely discredited this view (Gee, 1990).

3. To some extent, metacognitive learning theory and theory on learner self-direction encourage a similar perspective. These focus on learners' understanding and control of their learning processes. However, in these fields of theory, the focus is on internal control of study behaviour rather than control of curriculum per se.

4. For example, Pring (1975) points to problems with Bernstein's use of typologies based on the presence or absence of one condition (i.e. subject boundaries). Gibson (1977) criticises Bernstein's lack of conceptual clarity (Bradbury, 1990:231).

5. The nature of reality is discussed in Chapter 3.

6. The frames on teachers' decision-making reported by D. Smith (1983:243) and D. Smith and Lovat (1990:109) reflect the control structure of the school system even though this was not their intent.

7. D. Garrison and Baynton (1987) used the terminology of independence, power and support. 'Power' was renamed 'proficiency' in D. Garrison (1989:26). The equivalent terms used in this study (i.e. rights, resources and competencies) are Candy's (1991:418).

Chapter 3

PHILOSOPHY AND METHOD

3.1. Introduction

Studies of open education in the 1960s and 1970s, in line with those in education generally (Phillips, 1983), were typically conducted in the technocratic tradition. Horwitz (1979 cited in Giaconia and Hedges, 1982:580), for example, has reviewed over 200 empirical studies from this time investigating the relative merits of open and traditional education. This kind of research used positivistic methods emphasising experimental control and cause and effect reasoning as a means of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of instruction.

Much of the research into distance education and open learning has been conducted in a similar manner and with a similar focus on efficiency and effectiveness (e.g. Bates, 1981; Moore, 1989:7-29; Office of Technology Assessment, 1990:18). However, the general failure of positivistic methods to predict outcomes both in schooling generally and in media-based education, in particular, (e.g. Bates, 1981) has contributed, along with changing epistemologies, to a change in approach to the conduct of social science.

Since that era, social science research is said to have undergone a 'paradigm shift' introducing what is referred to in educational, research discourse as the new philosophy of science (e.g. Macmillan and Garrison, 1984). This has methodological implications for the conduct of the study deriving from its metaphysical underpinnnings. At issue are notions of 'what is knowledge?' and 'how do we know what we know?'. The shift was linked to an acknowledgment that all knowledge is subjective and was accompanied by an increase in the acceptability of qualitative research.

Despite the rhetoric, there is not **one**, new philosophy but at least **three** distinct philosophical positions, realist, relativist and pragmatist. Each of these has spawned variants. In this chapter, a review of the change in thinking about the nature and conduct of science and the reasons for it precedes consideration of these three contemporary philosophical positions. Even though these philosophies are underpinned by metaphysical positions which are opposed, considerable convergence on methodological issues is discernible.

The realist-coherentist assumptions informing the study are then elaborated with particular reference to their implications for social science. Consideration of the methodological implications of realism and the epistemological implications of coherence sets the stage for a description of the procedures employed to investigate open learning. Particular attention is paid to issues affecting the quality of the research.

3.2. The 'paradigm' shift

In order to understand the nature of the so-called paradigm shift in social science, it is first necessary to consider the meaning of the term, paradigm, itself. The nature of positivistic methods and the change in approach can then be considered.

A paradigm[1] has been described as a world view or general perspective (Patton, 1987:165). Kuhn used the term in the context of traditional science to refer to a coherent approach based on laws, theory, application and instrumentation (Kuhn, 1962:42). Paradigms have been considered to define what are seen as problems for inquiry as well as the modes of rationality and methods employed to illuminate them (Chubin and Restivo, 1983:61, Phillips, 1987:22).

According to Phillips (1987:22), while critics such as Scheffler (1967), Siegel (1980) and Toulmin (1971) have contested many aspects of Kuhn's argument, most accept his thesis that:

> scientists do work within the context of sets of theories and assumptions that play an important role in shaping the direction and form their work takes (Phillips, 1987:22).

Heidegger and Gadamer had earlier recognised a similar, fundamental dependence of interpretation upon prior understandings and the interpreter's own historical position and cultural perspective (Linge, 1976:xlvii-xlviii).

Kuhn's work focussed attention on the tacit, taken for granted assumptions and beliefs informing inquiry which is at once their strength and their weakness (Patton, 1978:203). It would be impossible to question all things at one time. Kuhn (1970:46) suggested that paradigms provide a framework for action but are accompanied by hidden assumptions which are rarely questioned. Paradigms, for Kuhn, encompassed the metaphysical, and therefore untestable assumptions of science, as well as accepted theory on problems deemed already solved (Kuhn, 1962:42). His conception encompassed both scientific theory and its practice (Barrow and Milburn, 1986:175) and thus acknowledged the inter-relationship of metaphysical assumptions and their implications for method and practice.

Burrell and Morgan (1979:3) have identified four fundamental metaphysical issues which influence research. The first of these concerns the nature of reality or being. This is the ontological question which may be expressed as 'What exists?' or alternatively as, 'What is there which we may attempt to know?' The second issue is epistemological and concerns the nature, origin and limits of knowledge. Related to this are methodological questions about how knowledge may be gleaned and the relative goodness of knowledge statements. This constitutes the third basic metaphysical issue. Finally, in social science, assumptions about human nature are also important for methodology and this is the fourth issue.

It is generally agreed that paradigmatic assumptions have important implications for research (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:2). Different assumptions are consistent with different methods of research and with their accompanying standards of adequacy. One's answers to these metaphysical questions explicitly or implicitly underpin methodological decisions and, for this reason, it is necessary for researchers to make their assumptions clear.

Burrell and Morgan (1979:3) have analysed contrasting standpoints on these four metaphysical issues along the objective-subjective dimension. In their analysis, positivism was defined as an objective epistemology. However, the term has also been used to describe the entire set of beliefs and practices integrating objectivity of ontology, epistemology, methodology and views on human nature (e.g. Guba and Lincoln, 1989:83; House, 1991). Positivistic social science, like traditional science, tended to operate within an objective set of assumptions on each of the four metaphysical issues of ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology.

In positivist approaches, the existence of a discrete, particulate, external reality (Blaikie, 1991) independent of the inquirer's interest in it is assumed (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:28). Knowledge is regarded as a mirror of reality (Woolgar, 1983:243) pieced together through observation of indisputable facts about the properties of real entities and the ways they interact. The researcher aims to be an independent observer, impartial and isolated from the events studied (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:28). The inquiry process is nomothetic seeking to explain events in terms of a small number of variables and their causal inter-relationships (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:3). Objectivity is sought through rigorous technique. Ideally, experimental manipulation of the objects under investigation under controlled conditions, is used to reveal universally applicable laws and theories which can be tested empirically by verifying or falsifying predictions deduced from them (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:6).

Applied to social science, positivism is associated with methods akin to those used in natural science. Human behaviour and social phenomena are investigated in terms of cause and effect reasoning which stresses the environmental and social determinants of action rather than individual will and human agency (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:6). The research approach is either nomothetic - focussing on categorisation and measurement and stressing quantitative analysis of data from large, representative samples - or historicist - seeking to interpret events objectively. For example, both Schleiermacher and Dilthey focussed on method to overcome errors in interpretation and recover the true or intended meaning (Linge, 1976:xiii). Even though verstehen (or understanding) in the interpretive disciplines was distinguished from the kind of explanation sought in the physical sciences, the approach was positivist in seeking the 'correct' interpretation through rigorous application of objective method (Outhwaite, 1987:62-64).

In recent times, positivism has been largely discredited, even to the extent of claiming that "positivism is dead" (Popper, 1974:69 cited in Phillips, 1983). A post-positivistic, post-Kuhnian or new philosophy of science has been proclaimed (Macmillan and Garrison, 1984; Phillips, 1983) in which qualitative methods have increased status. On the other hand, it is also claimed that positivistic thinking is still guiding most educational research as a "dominant ideology" (Giroux, 1981:42 cited in Phillips, 1983).

In fairness to the allegedly dead, and as a means of explicating both the 'new philosophy' and the assumptions underpinning this study, a closer examination of positivism is warranted together with elaboration of the arguments discrediting it.

3.3 Positivism

The term, positivism, has been said to have little more precise meaning than as a derogatory epithet (Giddens, 1974:preface) and indeed a range of meaning is evident in the literature.

Positivism has been equated with traditional science (Guba and Lincoln, 1989:83; House, 1991) and, in this sense, it is historically sensible as a reaction to scholasticism and absolutism which emphasised theology and metaphysics as sources of illumination for human problems. It is not difficult to sympathise with such a motive. The scientific or empirical approach began to replace these earlier alternatives when people such as Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) sought knowledge through observation of the world (Lundgren, 1983:21). Traditional science represented an attempt to ground knowledge in empirical observation, a goal still respected by many of its critics. It has proved to be a remarkably powerful approach in many fields.

But, strictly speaking, positivism is neither as monolithic, as invariant nor as totally objective as some opponents suppose. As well as its use as a synonym for traditional, physical science, Phillips (1987:38) has recognised another four possible referents for the term: namely, Comptean-type positivism, logical positivism, behaviourism and empiricism. A plurality of meaning is apparent and this encompassed a degree of subjectivity.

Harré (1981:3 cited in Lincoln and Guba, 1985:22) regarded positivism as a fallback position of traditional science when challenged and not its everyday mode of operation. In another sense, positivism is also something of a straw effigy constructed by its critics to facilitate refutation. Lincoln and Guba (1985:24) admit to defining positivism in terms of the points they wish to challenge. In this sense, positivism is a caricature of the perceived sins of traditional science, perhaps the greatest of which was a naively confident use of objective, scientific method.

As an effigy of science, objective in respect of ontology, epistemology, human nature and method, positivism is useful as a means of crystallising what the new philosophy is **not**, focussing the arguments against objective approaches and explaining the assumptions of the new philosophy. Positivism's lack of success in solving the problems of social science, together with new understandings of the limits of objectivity and the way scientists operate (the sociology of science) have armed the attack on positivism.

3.3.1 Undermining positivism

There are two main lines of evidence against the effigy of positivism (Knorr-Cetina and Mulkay, 1983:3) and each of these has important implications for social science research. The first concerns the under-determination of theory and this demonstrates the provisional nature of all knowledge. The second concerns the theory laden-ness of observation and this highlights its subjectivity and undermines positivistic assumptions about independent observation.

Scientists traditionally aimed to discover absolute truth as correspondence with reality, an approach known as naive realism. However, every candidate suggested as an unassailable foundation of knowledge has been discredited and it is accepted that there is no infallible means of establishing correspondence truth (Evers, 1988; Lehrer, 1990:62; Walker, J., 1991). For centuries, establishing truth was considered to be the role of religion and logic, however, the impact of the Renaissance, the Reformation and scientific rationality questioned this stance (e.g. Lundgren, 1983:21). The problem of generating knowledge through induction from experience, namely that an undiscovered, conflicting case could yet exist, has also long been recognised (Phillips, 1987:7). Popper subsequently proposed that although theories could not be proved correct (verified), they could be falsified if predictions deduced from them were disproved (Phillips, 1987:8). Thus, knowledge could be improved through the detection of errors. On this view, the growth of knowledge could be, at best, a trial and error affair asymptotically approaching reality.

But even this notion of ongoing refutation has severe limitations in practice as was suggested earlier. It is always possible to retain a theory in the face of contra-indicatory evidence by modifying the theory, altering its assumptions or questioning the accuracy of contradictory evidence (Phillips, 1987:12). Furthermore, it is not usually possible to attempt to verify more than a small portion of a theory at a time. A negative result prompts the question of which aspect of the theory, assumptions or testing procedure to doubt. Thus, theories are said to be under-determined in logic (Garrison, J., 1986; Miller and Fredericks, 1991). Furthermore, since it is possible for alternative theories consistent with the evidence to co-exist, theories are also said to be under-determined in terms of evidence (Garrison, J., 1986).

Because theory is under-determined, the positivistic model of science, infallibly testing theoretical predictions and discarding theories that do not stand the test, cannot be sustained. This view of science now appears naive and simplistic. Science becomes more a practical art of judgement as new experience is weighed against the total web of belief (Quine, 1961 cited in Garrison, J., 1986:14). This holistic view, known as the Duhem-Quine thesis (Garrison, J., 1986; Phillips, 1987:13), is far removed from the positivist conception of rational science in which theory-neutral facts were collected by passive, independent observers to test theoretical models as the recipe for unveiling truth.

The crucial role of intuition, hunches, thought experiments and guesswork in new theory generation (Guba and Lincoln, 1989:165) complements the human face of science and this too contrasts strongly with positivism which concentrated on verification to the neglect of the discovery process (Guba and Lincoln, 1989:164).

Observation and interpretation are now understood to be far from neutral processes and this is the second major line of evidence undermining positivism. According to Hanson's thesis, the theory, hypothesis, framework or background knowledge held by an investigator can strongly influence what is observed (Phillips, 1987:9). Facts or observations obtain their meaning, at least in part, from theory (Evers, 1988; Gee, 1990:8). What counts as evidence, indeed what counts as a potentially solvable problem, is determined by theory and since observations only have meaning within a theoretical framework, there may be no rational means of comparing theories. In Kuhn's terms, theories may be incommensurable with insufficient common ground for debate or testing (Garrison, J., 1986).

With respect to the interpretive disciplines, Gadamer stressed that interpretation can never be free of bias arising from the interpreter's own culture and context because it is only on this basis that interpretation is possible (Linge, 1976:xiv). Since language, following Wittgenstein, operates according to internal sets of rules, it is necessary, as Winch emphasised, to understand cultural practices from within (Phillips, 1987:25,26). On this basis, cultural forms have also been considered incommensurable.

Contemporary linguistic theory stresses that values and power relations are integral to both theory and observation (Gee, 1990:8-10). This is also damaging to the positivist view in which names were considered as labels with direct correspondence to their objects of reference (Barnes, 1983:30; Harré, Clark and De Carlo, 1985:101), true statements were considered to be value-free descriptions of the way things really were and scientific inquiry was presumed to be ethically neutral (Habermas, 1978:303).

According to Barnes (1983:19-52), learning the concepts of a culture demands attention to knowledgeable authorities and common usage while applying concepts requires judgement, negotiation and consensus. Since language functions as a practical resource for the accomplishment of socially, valuable work, the needs and interests of a linguistic community influence concept development and common usage. Gee (1992:8021) stressed that the entanglement of language and values is not merely incidental but fundamental as it arises from the social practices which give words their meaning within discourses. These social practices implicitly involve benefits and sanctions which reinforce what is regarded as normal or good within that practice and sustain relations and conflict for power (Gee, 1990:9). Nietzsche and Foucault saw all knowledge claims as moves in a power game (Rorty, 1982:205). On this basis, knowledge is not only theory-laden, but value laden as well.

While these arguments undermine positivist assumptions of ethical impartiality, they have the benefit of making moral theories objects of knowledge like any other theory. Since values and morals are learned, applied and negotiated in a similar manner to other theories, they are indistinguishable in cognitive theory from other theoretical concepts and therefore open to scientific study (Evers, 1988; Evers and Lakomski, 1991:185).

All this implies a fundamental subjectivity of human knowledge deriving from the nature of human language and cognition. This subjectivity effectively undermines the possibility of theory-neutral facts and clouds distinctions between notions of theory, observation, fact, value, truth, meaning and interpretation (e.g. Evers and Lakomski, 1991:185). It appears there is no infallible means of advancing knowledge, no means of passively observing an independent reality and no knowledge but man's subjective ordering of his experiences. From this, it seems that the new philosophy must entail a subjective epistemology. Despite this convergence, post-positivistic inquiry contains ongoing tensions between realism, relativism and pragmatism in their various forms. There is not one new philosophy but rather a range of competing views. In order to clarify the dimensions of the continuing debate, it is appropriate to consider the subjective extreme on metaphysical questions and the pragmatist position.

3.4 Relativism

Inquiry emphasising the subjective is known variously as constructivist, naturalistic[2], hermeneutic, interpretive (Guba and Lincoln, 1989:83), anti-positivistic (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:3) and relativistic (Rorty, 1982:166). As with positivism, there are significant difficulties with subjective philosophies also.

The epitome of subjectivity is solipsism which altogether rejects an independent reality and sees knowledge as the subjective and arbitrary creation of the individual mind (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:238). To be consistent, that single mind must be that of the solipsist for other people are acknowledged to exist only in this realm. In this view, events are equivalent to mental experience or imagination. The only logical, potential source of action open to the solipsist is mind control. However, even though this extreme position seems absurd, it is difficult to refute (Maclachlan, 1989:70). It is self annihilating, however, for if everything is a personal dream, so too is it.

Lincoln and Guba (1985:83) argue for a less extreme version of relativism called constructivism, which adopts the structuralist and post-structuralist view of language as creating its own reality as a shared, collective construction free of reference beyond itself (Devitt and Sterelny, 1987:219). While there is strength in the notion of socially created reality to which the discussion will return, there are also several impediments in this ontology.

The fundamental flaw of relativist philosophies is said to be the epistemic fallacy which is "the definition of being in terms of knowledge" (Bhaskar, 1989:181). This error equates 'what is', with human knowledge of it and takes epistemology for ontology. The error is evident in the way Guba and Lincoln (1989:83) express the ontological question. They ask "What is there that can be known?". This neglects the possibility of a reality beyond human experience and perception and implies that what cannot be known, does not exist. Another objection is that intermediary, relativistic positions are difficult to maintain against collapse to solipsism except by appeal to the unexpected and uncontrollable nature of experience which is indicative of a reality beyond human construction.

The arguments discrediting positivism, outlined previously, are essentially epistemological and supportive of subjective views of the nature of knowledge. Given this general consensus on epistemology, and given the essentially insoluble nature of metaphysical problems, it needs to be asked whether ontological questions have value beyond the esoteric and whether differing assumptions on the nature of reality influence the conduct of research.

3.5 Pragmatism

The pragmatist's answer following James, Dewey and the later Wittgenstein is that, since metaphysical questions are unanswerable, it would be advisable to stop asking them (Rorty, 1982:xiv). It is not that the pragmatist disavows reality but rather that it is seen as " either the purely vacuous notion of the ineffable cause of sense and the goal of intellect or else the name for the objects which inquiry at the moment is leaving alone" (Rorty, 1982:14). Reality, in this view, is simply not something it is possible to develop a fruitful philosophy about (Rorty, 1991:7) because this would require us, as Nagel (1986:11) put it, to climb out of our own minds.

Davidson (1986:319 cited in Rorty, 1991:10) has argued from an holistic, evolutionary perspective regarding language as an adaptive feature of the behaviour of human beings, that most beliefs must be in touch with reality for survival. When theories change, the majority of beliefs remain untouched. Nevertheless, as there is no test of the accuracy of knowledge as a representation of reality which can be independent of mind and language (Rorty, 1991:6) and no difference which makes a difference between 'its true because it works' and 'it works because its true', the pragmatist would like to abandon the topic altogether (Rorty, 1982:xxix). Quine (1951 cited in Katz, 1990:11) advocated separating theories of meaning from reference to reality and simply studying the meanings themselves.

3.6 The significance of ontology

The significance of ontological assumptions, however, lies in their relevance to procedures for establishing the relative worth of knowledge claims for, if there is no reality providing a basis for perception, and knowledge is but a construction with no connection at all to a physical reality, then all explanations are equally good. The difficulty of the relativist position is that it leaves no logical grounds for assessing credibility apart from consensus (Laudan, 1988:118; Walker, J., 1985a, 1985b). Guba and Lincoln (1989:148) suggest that constructions may change after consideration of a better informed alternative. On what basis, however, can a judgement be made? Without recourse to realism in the form of empirical data, conceived as the joint product of our perceptual systems, prior theory and detected energy patterns from physical and social reality, the only alternatives would seem to be divine inspiration and pure thought isolated from external influences. While the former is unlikely to be given much credence as a basis for scientific theory, the latter reverts to solipsism.

Since relativism accepts competing conceptions, it also has the disadvantage of reinforcing the theory of incommensurable paradigms (P-theory). This is disadvantageous because P-theory is incoherent on several grounds. In the first instance, P-theory accepts the existence of internally consistent but mutually incompatible and unintelligible constructions of knowledge. On logical grounds, equal legitimacy should be granted to theories which oppose it and this includes tolerance of realism (Phillips, 1987:24; Walker, J., and Evers, 1989). Constructivism is, thus, incoherent in setting consistency as an internal requirement of competing 'paradigms' while rejecting coherence as a global virtue for theories of knowledge.

Another difficulty is that P-theory requires conditions it cannot explain (Evers and Lakomski, 1991:230-233; Walker, J., 1985a, 1985b). Evers and Lakomski (1991:230) argued as follows. If paradigms are accepted as distinct, incommensurable and entirely reliant on their own theory for meaning, then they are essentially unlearnable. If, on the other hand, it is accepted that meaning is shared between paradigms, that some common touchstone exists, then theory on paradigms collapses to a unitary theory of knowledge composed of competing theories. From this perspective, paradigms are equivalent to super-theories but are competing theories none the less.

Even though the naive realist position has been extensively discredited, it continues to be the commonsense approach to living (Woolgar, 1983:244). Indeed, researchers espousing a relativist ontology frequently continue with the old philosophy and the common-sense mode in practice (Bhaskar, 1989:11; Woolgar, 1983:262). The basic objection to belief in a real world has been the subjective nature of human perception which, in conjunction with Descartes legacy of withholding belief in the absence of watertight proof, has allowed relativism to flourish (Maclachlan, 1989:106). Incontrovertible proof is never likely to be available, yet belief in reality appears sensible as the everyday mode of thinking and acting in the world.

As explained by Maclachlan (1989:98-100) modern perception theory suggests that belief in reality may be, as Kant first postulated, an á priori characteristic of human perception. That is, it is the way of thinking inbuilt into human, cognitive processes and a necessary characteristic of mental functioning. This faculty allows us to make sense of incomplete perceptual data, to infer the continued existence of objects no longer perceived and infer causal associations. As a simple example, we continue to believe the dog exists when it disappears, unperceived, behind a tree and infer the barking noise we hear to come from the dog. Belief in reality thus serves as a device to predict future events (I might get bitten if I go behind the tree) and provides a survival advantage.

Ontology is also important because a viable philosophy needs to encompass what the world and human mind must be like for us to develop knowledge (Walker, J., and Evers, 1989). Our knowledge may not be that of neutral, passive observers, may be at best a product of participating and interacting with the physical and social world, however, the stability of this observed interaction under similar conditions is suggestive of some underlying order. The unexpected and uncontrollable nature of experience suggests a potent, external reality. We assume the existence of real referents for our sense perceptions and seek to explain the regularities we detect in terms of the structure and necessary modes of acting of real entities. Our knowledge may not correspond to, or accurately reflect, reality but it appears to be causally influenced by it. Rather than disavow reality, we should conclude with Quine (1966:238) that such is the nature of evidence.

While the subjective nature of knowledge is accepted, relativism has been shown to be absurd in the extreme and to neglect the basic, ontological question. It also leads to epistemological positions such as incommensurable paradigm theory which are either incoherent or self destructive. Furthermore, it contains no logical notion of error. Pragmatism copes by disavowing the issues.

New realism is selected as the basis of this study because it aims to circumvent sceptical objections centred on the subjectivity of knowledge and yet avoid both the epistemic fallacy and the pragmatist solution by addressing the ontological question directly[3]. The assumptions and implications of new realism are outlined in the following section.

A viable philosophy also needs to provide an acceptable stance on the nature of knowledge and research methods for its advancement (e.g. Bhaskar, 1989:183). The study adopts coherence criteria for this purpose since alternatives offered firstly, by paradigm theory (namely, intra-paradigm consensus) and secondly, by naive realism (namely, correspondence to reality) have been discredited. Although fallible, coherence, in conjunction with an openness to alternatives, seems the most appropriate way forward. After introducing new realism and outlining its implications for social science, means of establishing research quality consistent with these assumptions are explored. The methodology of the study is then described.

3.7 New realism and coherentism

Contemporary, realist philosophy acknowledges the autonomy of ontology from epistemology. Although the latter is seen as dependent on the former, 'to be' and 'to be known' are not regarded as equivalent.

In some forms of realism such as empiricism, which includes both logical positivism (Phillips, 1983) and classical empiricism, the real was restricted to the observable or the perceived (Bhaskar, 1978:14). Theoretical entities were either seen as unnecessary or as convenient fictions - conceptual tools for the arrangement of observed facts and the prediction of events (Chalmers, 1982:146; Outhwaite, 1987:44; Phillips, 1983).

In these philosophies, causation was conceived in Humean fashion as the constant conjunction of discrete events (Outhwaite, 1987:21). For example, night always follows day by virtue of the way things always are and, in these conceptions, no other necessary reason for the regularity was required for its explanation. This view was based on universal, empirical regularities which were often only demonstrable in artificially controlled or closed, experimental systems (Sayer, 1984:113-5). The conception of causation as empirical regularity provided no means of distinguishing between an accidental association of events and a necessary sequence and no explanation of causal mechanisms, such as opposing forces, operating without effect (Bhaskar, 1978:151).

In contrast to philosophies confining the real to the observable, transcendental, scientific realism accepts the reality of unperceived objects and recognises three domains of reality.

These are:

- the empirical domain of experience and observation,
- the actual domain of all potentially perceivable objects and events (whether detected or unobserved and whether perceived directly by the senses or with technical instrumentation), and
- the domain of the real consisting of the processes and mechanisms that generate events and the states of relations between the real of various kinds (Bhaskar, 1978:13; Blaikie, 1991; Harré, 1986:58).

In this view, real entities and mechanisms may be operating even though counteracting tendencies may mean that no effect is apparent (Sayer, 1984:115). Because this philosophy accepts a reality beyond perception it is called transcendental.

Real entities include empirical objects and events, the constitutive structure of entities, their productive inter-relationships and the generative mechanisms enabling entities to exercise their causal powers and liabilities[4] to produce effects. Causal powers have been analysed by Harré and Madden (1975:90,140) to be the natural tendencies of entities to behave and interact in certain ways under particular conditions. These powers may exist latent and unrealised or be exercised in which case they may or may not produce an effect (Bhaskar, 1978:18; Harré, 1979:38).

The realist theory of causation as natural necessity supplants the Humean conception of cause as the constant conjunction of events. It replaces a theorem like prescription for causality with a conception whose explanatory power lies in the specific content of the mechanism postulated (Harré, 1979:161; Harré and Madden, 1975:128). Its emphasis on the natural mode of acting of entities is consistent with a view of science in which metaphor, analogy, models and imagination are important explanatory tools (Harré and Secord, 1972:73). Central to explanatory theory is an image of the components of a natural structure or a mechanism in operation (Bhaskar, 1978:13; Harré and Madden, 1975:129). Theory thus explains, at an abstract level, the necessary relations and causal tendencies of real entities (Sayer, 1984:131).

3.7.1 The ontological status of social phenomena

To be able to apply a realist philosophy to the phenomena of social world, real social entities must exist and act independently of our knowledge of them (Outhwaite, 1987:47). In other words, for realism to be applicable to the objects of study of social science, at least some knowledge of social phenomena must refer to intransitive[5], real, social entities, structures or mechanisms with generative potential. Knowledge of society primarily concerns unobservable, theoretical abstractions of social construction. However, within a transcendental, realist philosophy the unobservable nature of social abstractions need not preclude their real, ontological status (Outhwaite, 1987:47).

Social phenomena can be established as real entities independent of human knowledge and description of them through their possession of causal powers (Bhaskar, 1989:69,81; Outhwaite, 1987:51), that is their ability to produce effects. Durkheim, in effect, argued the causal power of social realities with his criterion, constraint, which emphasised the coercive, rather than the enabling, nature of social boundaries, conventions and practices (Bhaskar, 1989:81).

According to Bhaskar, (1990:11) the primary reality of the social world is conversation. In Harré's words:

> There is a species wide and history long conversation, only partially available to individuals...These are structured for each of us by local moral orders, that is, by tacitly accepted systems of rights, duties and obligations fixing the role of contributors to this or that conversation...In the ultimate stages of the development of the reflexive study of human life, we pass beyond conversation and investigation of those language games that are transparent to any one of us to the open set of possibilities that are the affordances of conversation...The conversation is only so far malleable to the influence of individuals speakers (Harré, 1990:350).

Social realities include rule systems and the thoughts, language and practices of people (Popkewitz, 1990:57). Meanings and cognitive processes are real (Harré, 1986:70) as are social structures, events in social life (Harré, 1979:37) and social relations between people, between people and nature and between people and their social products (Bhaskar, 1979:52). Social structures and activities are relatively enduring through the stability of social positions, functions, relationships and practices (Bhaskar, 1989:71). Social entities exist "not just as [their] daily manifestations, but as the habits, prejudices, beliefs, knowledge and expectations of [their] constituent members, and of the general public who know of it, and of the officials and functionaries who are related to it" (Harré, 1979:99).

While the real status of social phenomena can be established through the displayed property of causal efficacy, their independence from voluntary, human action is manifested through their pre-existence (Outhwaite, 1987:51). Although historically constructed by people and reinstantiated in the present by the activities of people, social phenomena pre-exist individuals (Outhwaite, 1987:51) and, like real objects of nature, display rigidity, resilience, autonomy and independence (Currie, 1988:208). Social realities are only so far open to manipulation according to individual wishes (Harré, 1990:350).

The independence of social structures and events is supported by, but not reliant upon, a relational and transformational model of society[6] in which the causal powers of social phenomena are not reducible to individual, human agency[7] (Bhaskar, 1979:46; 1989:73-79). According to the transformational model:

> people do not create society. For it always pre-exists them and is a necessary condition for their activity. Rather, society must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce or transform, but which would not exist unless they did so. Society does not exist independently of conscious human activity (the error of reification). But it is not the product of it (the error of voluntarism). Now the processes whereby the stocks of skills and competences and habits appropriate to given social contexts are acquired and maintained could be generically referred to as 'socialisation'...Reproduction and/or transformation of society, though for the most part unconscious...is an achievement...of active subjects, not a mechanical consequence of antecedent conditions. (Bhaskar, 1979:45).

In essence, society is an independent, real entity because it confronts individuals as an established given and displays causal powers over and above the sum of its parts. These additional powers have been referred to as emergent powers by Bhaskar (1989:77) and Harré (1979:95, 1981) and as unintended consequences by Giddens (1981:161). According to Bhaskar (1989:71,4), the results of human action can be more than those intended by the people involved, partly because the persistent relations between people in society are an important and often opaque element of society which voluntarist explanations of society, following Weber, do not adequately take into account. Thus, people do not, in the present, create society but they do presuppose it and contain the potential to transform it. They re-create social reality or transform it in acting out their social relationships in accordance with their values, beliefs and social theories (Gee, 1990:9).

3.7.2 The nature of social science

New realism accepts the reality of social phenomena and opens the way for a unitary conception of science in all fields of study. As in the natural sciences, explanation in social science requires understanding of the necessary structure and causal processes (generative mechanisms) behind behaviour, structures and events (Harré, 1979:161-3). These generative mechanisms reside in the intentions, plans and commitments of people (Harré, 1979:71) and their reasons for acting as they do (Bhaskar, 1989:79; Sayer, 1984:101,102).

However, the reasons people, themselves, give for their actions may be distinct from causal explanations (Outhwaite, 1987:50). The meaningfulness of action is dependent, not only upon intent, but also upon interpretation which involves "interconnections between language, [other] action and the surrounding circumstances" (Bartlett, 1991:22). Thus, generative mechanisms also reside both in action, itself, which can be meaningful without initial intent (Bartlett, 1991) and in the unintended consequences of, and necessary social conditions for, action (Bhaskar, 1989:78-80; Sayer, 1984:101,102). Knowledge and belief are integral to plan formulation. Translation of plans into action presupposes tacit knowledge of social structure and competence in using material resources and the conventions and rules of socio-linguistic communication (Harré, 1979:71; Sayer, 1984:102).

Social science is not just the study of regularities between stimulus and effect in the behaviourist tradition. It involves interpretation of people's actions and the reasons and intentions for their actions. While intentions relate to mental states rather than observable phenomena (Bartlett, 1991), access to this kind of evidence is available in the verbal accounts people give of their actions (Bhaskar, 1989:79). Explanation also requires analysis of the necessary conditions for action, that is, those features of the social environment which both limit action and make it possible. This involves understanding the genesis and functioning of social structures and conventions as well as the relevant context (Popkewitz, 1990:57,64; Sayer, 1984:104,117).

While social phenomena are amenable to study from a realist perspective, it is nevertheless important that several unique features of social phenomena in comparison with natural phenomena be recognised. These distinctions place restrictions on the nature of knowledge in social science and on appropriate methods. The differences are ontological, epistemological, relational and critical (Bhaskar, 1989:57,82).

With respect to ontology, social realities, unlike phenomena of the natural world, do not exist independently of the conceptions we form of them because they are the products of human social activity (Bhaskar, 1989:79; Outhwaite, 1987:47). According to Bhaskar (1989:78-79), social structures exist only "in virtue of the activities they govern and cannot be empirically identified independently of them". Furthermore, since social structures and practices may change, the tendencies of society "may only be relatively enduring" and "may not be universal".

Epistemologically, social tendencies are displayed in open systems[8] where a multitude of causal influences mask invariant, empirical regularities (Bhaskar, 1979:57; 1989:82,184) and where change in the object of study or in its relationship with the environment is possible (Sayer, 1984:113). The social sciences must therefore rely largely upon á posteriori explanation (retroduction) rather than the experimental-predictive techniques successful in closed systems.

Human subjects and, by a remove, the social phenomena they reinstantiate, are potentially responsive to the meanings social science assigns to them (Bhaskar, 1989:84,186). Whereas physical objects are thought to be impervious to, and unaffected by, the meanings people ascribe to them, in the social realm, phenomena are not independent of our conceptions of them. Knowledge of society and social phenomena are, instead, relational and causally interdependent (Bhaskar, 1979:60, 1989:84). One consequence of this interdependence is that while interpretation and hermeneutic methods are pre-requisite for any knowledge (Thompson, 1984:139), social science must contend with a feedback effect from knowledge to its object (Bhaskar, 1990:9). Social science is not only subjective, but inter-subjective (Giddens, 1974:9). A double hermeneutic is operative, as Giddens (1976:158 cited in Outhwaite, 1987:70) has said, as our knowledge of interpretive processes provides the conditions for interpreting social phenomena. In turn, our transformed knowledge and beliefs are utilised to inform future actions.

Because of this feedback between knowledge and its social object, all social science is potentially critical of current practice and social structures (Bhaskar, 1990:9). If the causal structures and mechanisms revealed by social science prove to be inconsistent with beliefs and values, a negative evaluation of those structures and mechanisms will follow, thus opening the way for the elaboration of action strategies to reduce the contradictions (Bhaskar, 1989:89,186). Evaluation of interpretations is unavoidable as each person considers which conceptions to adopt as their own and accommodates new information into their systems of belief.

Interpretation of society **as it is** begs the question of how and why it came to be this way and questions the structures and conditions supporting the present situation. This additional inquiry goes beyond understanding social phenomena from the participants' point of view to a structural and causal analysis in which the actors' interpretation is but one perspective (Bartlett, 1991).

Because social theories are themselves causes linked to the distribution of social goods (Gee, 1990:8-19), the advantages and disadvantages of particular theories and practices for different social groups need to be examined if a comprehensive understanding is to be generated. Derrida has drawn attention to the role of rhetoric as a socially generative force which can be used both for maintaining and transforming society (Quantz, 1992:469). This is achieved through appeal to various authorities and exploitation of differences in meaning (Apple, 1982:151; Codd, 1988). The traditions of deconstruction and critical reflection, which build upon the work of Derrida and Habermas respectively, have been developed to stimulate critical analysis.

Research on society 'as it is' also has implications for society 'as it should be' and this requires that values are theorised and incorporated within a forward looking, social theory. Critical theorists following Marx and Habermas set freedom from illusion and human emancipation as their goals (e.g. Habermas, 1978:309) but any social science may contribute a critical function, even if it does not set out to expose contradictory beliefs and practices or reduce domination and oppression. Nevertheless, an open mind expressed as a willingness to question existing beliefs is an aid to critical thinking.

According to Sarup (1993:98), Foucault took subjectivity as reason to conclude that freedom and emancipation are impossible goals. Dewey, on the other hand, is interpreted by Rorty (1982:207) as seizing optimistically on subjectivity as an opportunity for humankind to decide for itself what is good by way of belief in order to create harmony between diverse desires and interests.

Realist philosophy, while assuming the existence of real referents, accepts a subjective epistemology. It views social reality as causally influencing, but responsive to, our knowledge of it and subjectively construed. Knowledge is seen as potentially transcending the understandings of the people involved in a phenomenon and as a resource for shaping the future. Nevertheless, not all explanations or social theories are equally good. The research methods consistent with this philosophy need to be explored.

3.7.3 Implications of realism for research methodology

Social research is concerned with the description and explanation of social phenomena in open systems. Such research is always reliant upon prior theory, never value free, and inherently although not always explicitly critical. Appropriate explanation of social effects must consider human action, social structures, mechanisms and events as well as contextual events and circumstances. On this basis, the discussion now considers how social phenomena may be adequately described, analysed and theorised.

It is apparent that there are limited opportunities for experimental control procedures in social research (Outhwaite, 1987:54) and it is doubtful whether the conclusions gleaned in artificially closed experiments can successfully predict outcomes when translated to real, open systems (Sayer, 1984:114). On the other hand, knowledge about the pervasiveness of particular behaviours and perceptions and their demographic, contextual and personality correlates can be obtained through extensive, survey research and quantitative analysis. While survey methodology provides summary statistics from a large number of people, it is less appropriate for disentangling the complex interactions of causative influences in open, social situations.

This task requires intensive, qualitative study and interpretation of actors' accounts of their own knowledge as well as analysis of contextual and historical circumstances (Bartlett, 1991). Intensive study provides a deep understanding through thorough study of a smaller number of cases (Patton, 1987:9). Explanation of open, social systems requires an understanding of the meanings actors themselves construe but may transcend the knowledge of participants with further levels of analysis or incorporation of information from other sources. Appropriate methods in social science are, as the methods of all human understanding are now understood to be, necessarily interpretive and hermeneutic (Barnes, 1983:30; Outhwaite, 1987:61;

Sayer, 1984:37) due to the nature of theory and communication as already discussed.

Interpretation and analysis is based upon initial description and this introduces the possibility that actions, structures and events may be described in various ways (Bartlett, 1991). The meaning ascribed in interpreting such descriptions is, therefore, dependent upon the description and based on two main assumptions. Firstly, it is assumed that meaning, although neither exhausted nor determined by description, can be specified in it (Thompson, 1981:142 cited in Bartlett, 1991). Secondly, it is assumed that explanation of the social genesis of phenomena is possible through reclaiming the meanings recorded in descriptions and through reconstruction and analysis of structural conditions (Bartlett, 1991). Nevertheless, the explanation generated is an interpretation and does not preclude alternative explanations.

Hermeneutic interpretation, as well as ordinary communication, relies upon a vast resource of shared meanings of which we are largely unaware. In formal research, extant theory and preconceived conceptions are an important resource although their essential fallibility means that the researcher must be open to, and seek out, counter evidence and alternative explanations that nonetheless entail further fallibilities.

Because of the principle of theory laden-ness, knowledge can be neither discovered purely from data, nor created without preconceptions. All learning and knowledge development is dependent upon prior understandings as an essential precondition for learning to occur. Hence knowledge can only ever be transformed. As the metaphor attributed to Neurath explains, inquiry is like repairing a leaky boat plank by plank while still remaining afloat in it (Phillips, 1987:17).

The demise of positivism has been accompanied by a flowering of inductive methodologies such as grounded theory which eschew deduction from prior theory as an organiser for research (e.g. Glaser and Strauss, 1967:34,98). However, the new epistemology has established that any goal of developing theory unbiased by preconceptions is both misguided and unattainable. Prior theory plays an enabling role in knowledge growth as well as a constraining one.

The concern about using preconceived theory has always been that the data may be squeezed to fit the theory or that preconceptions may blind the researcher to alternative explanations (e.g. Glaser and Strauss, 1967:34,98). This view distorts the essential and enabling nature of prior knowledge and assumes an excessive degree of rigidity in the human cognitive apparatus. In Scheffler's words:

> There is no evidence for a general incapacity to learn from contrary observations, no proof of a pre-established harmony between what we believe and what we see...Our categories and expectations guide by orienting us selectively toward the future; they set us, in particular, to perceive in certain ways and not in others. Yet they do not blind us to the unforeseen. They allow us to recognise what fails to match anticipation. (Scheffler, 1967:44 cited in Phillips, 1987:11).

For human learning to occur at all, a limited plasticity of mind is essential (Churchland, 1979 cited in Evers and Lakomski, 1991:95). Learning would be impossible if new experiences could not potentially change our theories and without the ability to theorise (too much plasticity) we would lack the advantage of generalising from past experience (Evers and Lakomski, 1991:95). Grounded theorists, who stress induction, implicitly acknowledge the facilitatory role of existing theory in their use of "theoretical sensitivity" (e.g. Strauss and Corbin, 1990:41), in recommendations to "mine your intuition and experience" (Strauss, 1987:11) and in advocating means of extending prior theory (e.g. Strauss, 1987:306; 1970:46). But on what basis are changes in theory justified? How do we decide between alternative theories and how do we judge the quality and trustworthiness of research? Questions such as these are the focus of the following section.

3.7.4 Warrants of trustworthiness in research

Opinion on criteria for research quality reflects the general realist-relativist-pragmatist debate and, as yet, no clear standards have emerged (Howe and Eisenhart, 1990; Smith, J., 1990:170). In positivist science, research trustworthiness was a matter of accuracy and objectivity, a matter of reducing error and subjectivity in order to generate knowledge corresponding to reality. Methodological prescriptions were relied upon to secure 'validity' and 'reliability' which were the essential constructs of research quality (Guba and Lincoln, 1989:234).

Validity essentially refers to accuracy and freedom from misunderstanding, bias and error (Earle, 1989:34). Internal validity pertains to the individual study while external validity addresses the appropriateness of the findings beyond the sample studied. Reliability concerns the repeatability or stability of findings. Traditional science sought validity and reliability through control measures, representative sampling techniques and instrument standardisation which aimed to exclude the effects of causal influences other than those under investigation.

Post-positivistic epistemology creates a multitude of difficulties in claiming validity and reliability for it accepts that there are no epistemologically privileged foundations for knowledge claims. Despite this, researchers of all philosophical persuasions wish to distinguish between sloppy and quality inquiry. Research quality is thus a global virtue of research.

Paradigm theorists advocate assessing the status of knowledge claims relative to the paradigm employed (e.g. Palmer, 1992:55) but this approach has been shown to be epistemologically incoherent. They also advocate principles of negotiation and consensus (Smith, J., 1990:179) but what is the basis of deciding which perspective is better informed?

For the pragmatist, it is not necessary to have a global theory of truth or universal prescriptions for research trustworthiness. Rorty (1982:xiii-xxv), following James, regarded quality as simply a matter of what is good by way of belief. Furthermore, good ways to advance knowledge depend on the circumstances.

Realists are more confident that criteria for research quality can be specified. They retain objectivity as an ideal and distinguish between what people really believe and what the real situation is. For an understanding of meaning to constitute knowledge, some justification is considered necessary (Phillips, 1987:99) and not all knowledge constructions are equally warranted (Walker, J., and Evers, 1989:33). Realism allows that knowledge may be in error, beliefs may be misplaced and can be amended. In the social sciences, precision of meaning constitutes an important element of accuracy in the analysis of accounts (Harré and Secord, 1972:126). Validation involves analysis of the status of evidence (e.g. Bartlett, 1991), corroboration and cross-checking.

Realists distinguish between the meaning a concept holds for participants and its significance for the research (Hirsch, 1967 cited in Smith, J., 1990:174). They seek explanations beyond the understandings of the people involved in the social phenomenon under scrutiny. Depth hermeneutics provides a means of doing this through analysis of actors' accounts, social analysis and historical appreciation[9] (Bartlett, 1991; Thompson, 1984:134).

Although truth is, perhaps, best thought of as a folk concept, or a goal whose attainment is ultimately unknowable, in practice, we come to accept what our best and most stable theories tell us and operate on the basis of coherence (Evers, 1988, 1991; Evers and Lakomski, 1991:42).

Coherence criteria of research quality are at an early stage of development (Evers, 1991) but include, for example, plausibility, the general fit of the theory with other accepted theory, simplicity, explanatory power and empirical adequacy in terms of both comprehensiveness in accounting for data and freedom from anomaly and contradiction (Churchland, 1985:41-42 cited in Evers, 1991; Evers and Lakomski, 1991:9; Walker, J., 1991). According to Heron (1988:42), coherence obtains when knowledge from different sources is consistent.

The trustworthiness of research is, thus, more than empirical evidence, more than method, process and accounting. These are important for research quality but research must also meet coherence criteria such as those above. Furthermore, since values are also knowledge claims, theories also need to be consistent with ethical assumptions and social outcomes.

Since coherence assumes an epistemological unity of research, the best practice of established research traditions is available to it to enhance trustworthiness. Particular methods such as hermeneutics, interview technique and data analysis procedures may be utilised as appropriate. Eisenhart and Howe (1992:657-663) have suggested a combination of general and design-specific standards for validity which are summarised as:

- the fit between research questions, data collection procedures and analysis techniques,
- competent and effective application of procedures and techniques,
- alertness to, and coherence with, prior knowledge,
- attention to value constraints such as ethical issues and the implications of the research, and
- comprehensiveness.

From a constructivist perspective, Guba and Lincoln (1989:236-237) have developed a set of criteria for trustworthiness parallel to those of positivism and these are also useful indicators of qualitative research quality. To replace 'internal validity' they propose credibility. Defined as the match between respondents' constructed realities and their representation by researchers, this seems equivalent to the inter-subjective understanding sought in validation hermeneutics. These authors recommended member checking, negative case analysis, peer debriefing, prolonged engagement and persistent observation as means of improving credibility.

Guba and Lincoln's (1989:241) parallel to external validity is transferability or the applicability of findings to a new context. This is considered a matter of judgement of the degree and likely consequences of similarities and differences between the two contexts. Responsibility for transfer lies with those wishing to apply the findings in new settings rather than the initial researcher. However, this can be facilitated by detailed descriptions of the initial setting.

Reliability is paralleled by dependability and this refers to the stability of the findings over time (Guba and Lincoln, 1989:242). Reliability in the positivist sense involves the repeatability of the research. LeCompte and Goetz (1982) see this in terms of whether other researchers would reach the same conclusions and whether, given the constructs formulated, other researchers could match them to data. Guba and Lincoln (1989:242) refer to this as confirmability which they see as the parallel of objectivity. Clear definitions and records on the research process should increase both dependability and confirmability.

To this point, a realist-coherentist understanding of research in the social sciences has been developed as a basis for the conduct of this study. It is also necessary to provide details of the specific procedures employed. This is one aspect of demonstrating research quality. Nevertheless, overall quality is considered to transcend methodological considerations to encompass the value of the study, the appropriateness of the conceptual framework and the explanatory power and coherence of the interpretation generated.

Central to the methodology is the concept of transforming knowledge through the guiding, focussing and enabling qualities of prior knowledge, the transformatory potential of valid and comprehensive evidence, the creative interpretations of the researcher and procedures to enhance quality. Development of the inquiry process was a creative, problem solving process requiring deliberation and judgement to link the problem at hand to existing theory, to the effectiveness and appropriateness of possible methods and to consideration of the limitations inherent in all potential methods. The inquiry aimed to benefit from the acknowledged best practice of established research traditions. Nevertheless, the feasibility of different approaches within the constraints of the project was an unavoidable influence on the procedures adopted.

3.8 The inquiry

It is important to recognise that the research reported in this thesis was conducted during a period of rapid change and innovation with respect to open learning in Australia. The original intention was to centre the study on the Television Open Learning Project and early plans were made with this in mind. However, prior to the planned phase of data collection, the TVOLP was dissolved and replaced by the OLI. This necessitated renegotiating and transferring the study to the new initiative. The OLI ushered in an expanded and more permanent, but less discrete and less stable, phenomenon for study because of its ongoing development. The research focusses on the OLI as it was during the inaugural study period of 1993 from March 8 to June 25. This constituted the major phase of data collection. The inquiry continued to monitor policy changes at system and national level to the time of submission of the thesis. However, the report is primarily reflective of that early phase.

The overall design of the study has been established in the conceptual framework in Chapter 2. Element 2 of the framework concerns the methodology of the study and this needs to be elaborated. The methodology involves interpretation of evidence from three sources (namely, the three curriculum conceptions of open learning) within its socio-historic context. The context thus serves as a fourth source of evidence. For the overall interpretation, the methods of depth hermeneutics were employed. These, as previously mentioned, require an understanding of open learning which transcends the participants' point of view through social and historical analysis and interpretation (Bartlett, 1991; Thompson, 1984:135,137). The aim is to produce interpretations which are maximally good and historically and contextually insightful (Bartlett, 1991).

Bartlett (1991) suggested that the first step is to reclaim the meanings of actions, practices and text through inter-subjective understanding of actors' perspectives. The process then moves to reconstructing and explaining the structural conditions and historical residues retained in codes of practice. Important aspects of social analysis include identifying the contexts of individual action, the institutional frameworks of power and resources, and broader, structural relations (Thompson, 1984:133-9). Developing a coherent, maximally good explanation entails a tacking between the meaning of the whole and its parts (Bartlett, 1991). The anthropological-relativist tradition to curriculum within which the study is set is consistent with the interpretive methods of depth hermeneutics and with standards of coherence as it focusses on explanation in terms of causally significant aspects of contemporary and historical contexts.

In Dilthey's view, the purpose of hermeneutics is to unite the past with the present through a process of reconstruction (Ödman, 1985:2164). This is a process of mediation which is potentially endless and has no single, correct outcome (Gadamer, 1976:39).

As an aid to cognitive processing, creativity and keeping an open mind, throughout the inquiry, a file of memos on potentially useful information and ideas, developing insights and anomalies was kept. This strategy not only assisted memory and formed a record of developing ideas, but was also a deliberate attempt to prime the subconscious to search for alternatives and seek the best overall interpretation, a strategy called incubation (Torrance and Rockenstein, 1988:285).

The methods used to generate the three curriculum conceptions of open learning, on which the overall interpretation is based, also require elaboration. The framework for analysis specifies studying open learning as social theory, as intended curriculum and as perceived student experience. As these involve essentially different types of data from distinctly different sources, methods appropriate to each were formulated as follows.

Information on the theory of open learning was available primarily from published, documentary sources in the social scientific literature and in material on open learning programs produced by management and government. Analysis of this material entailed content analysis and review to generate the theoretical perspective.

The intended curriculum of the OLI was largely a matter of the policy decisions of the Initiative's designers which established the curriculum structures and policies within which the program would operate. This included broad policy such as funding levels and modes of delivery determined at government level as well as decisions setting the finer detail of the curriculum taken by those responsible for implementing the program.

The primary source of evidence on the curriculum intended for the OLI was documentary evidence located in official documents, publications on and from the program and scientific discourse. This was supported by personal communications with course providers and administrators involved with the Initiative. In this respect, key informants were utilised for two main reasons. A major consideration was that the total number of people involved in curriculum development in the Initiative was too large for comprehensive coverage to be a feasible proposition. There were, at that stage, twenty one single and double units on offer through the program from five different universities. All of these participating universities, as well as OLA as broker, contributed to curriculum formation, initially through interim committees and, later, through the Academic Programs Board. The second reason for using key informant interviews was that they are recognised as a productive and efficient means of collecting qualitative data of high quality (Patton, 1987:95). Since much of the data existed in documentary form, these interviews served a supplementary rather than primary role in illuminating the intended curriculum.

A variety of interview settings was used with key informants. These included group discussions, seminars organised specifically for the study, and interviews conducted on a one-to-one basis. A wide variety of modes of communication was employed as the need arose and these included face-to-face conversations as well as communications by telephone, post, facsimile and electronic mail. In all, twenty eight people concerned with curriculum development and implementation in the Initiative, as well as a number of observers, contributed to the research. Individual contributions have been acknowledged, as appropriate. Conversations with key informants were recorded with hand written notes which, although less accurate than tape recordings, were considered less threatening and more conducive to eliciting full and open responses.

Early contact with organisers of the TVOLP to negotiate access to a sample of students proved most valuable both as a source of documentary evidence and in facilitating contacts with other key informants. While contact with a few key people was maintained over an extended period of time, a field trip to Melbourne, Geelong and Sydney in the week of May 24-28, 1993 served as an intensive period of data collection from program implementors. During this field trip, staff of OLA, Monash and Deakin Universities, the ABC and the evaluators of the TVOLP were contacted.

Discussions with these informants centred on the intended curriculum but also canvassed data relevant to the social analysis of the program. Informants contributed their personal understandings of open learning and the impact of the OLI, its implications and reasons for being as well as opinion on the openness manifest in and through the program. The study's interest in curriculum intentions did not extend to specific learning objectives internal to the units on offer but was confined to system level curriculum intentions. Nevertheless, some understanding of the nature of specific units was gained through conversation, by viewing some of the television broadcasts in all units and through examination of the course materials used for six of the seven TVOLP units (statistics excepted) run the preceding year. These had been collected for the DEET-funded evaluation of that project.

As a means of validating the detail and interpretation of the intended curriculum generated by the study, a draft of Chapter 5 was negotiated with Richard Johnson, a consultant on open learning in Australia. Informants were also invited to confirm details attributed to them from personal interviews and a list of these personal sources is provided in Appendix A. Personal communications from public forums were not negotiated in this way as they were not considered to be private communications.

Evidence concerning learners' experiences was collected with the voluntary assistance of a sample of 44 students registered[10] with OLA in its first study period. The sample was selected in a purposive manner from responses to an initial, demographic survey which was circulated with the cooperation of OLA in conjunction with their mail-out of confirmation of registration. As student confidentiality precluded access to registration information, the voluntary responses to this letter (reproduced in Appendix B) served as the basis for drawing the sample.

The criteria for sample selection were designed for coherence and efficiency of data collection. They were determined on the basis of prior knowledge of open learning, in general, and the intentions of the Initiative so that demographic groups of particular relevance to the study could be included. As access and equity had been included amongst intentions for the TVOLP (see page 145) and was Labor Party policy, the sampling was designed to include students from groups previously identified as under-represented in Australian higher education. The demographic groups of concern were identified in *A fair chance for all: Higher education that's within everyone's reach* (DEET, 1990a:10) as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people, people with disabilities, people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, women particularly in postgraduate research and in non-traditional areas of study, people from non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB) and people from rural and isolated areas.

Similarly, because of interest in the potential of Open Learning to cater to unmet demand for university places from school leavers and mature-age students (Television Open Learning Project Consortium [TVOLP Consortium], 1992:2), these demographic groups were also purposively targeted. A spread of students across units from the various participating universities was also secured. Furthermore, as meeting learners' needs is an existing conception of open learning (e.g. Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training [SCEET], 1989), the sample also included learners with a wide range of educational backgrounds as this would increase the likelihood of sampling learners with different learning needs.

The decision to sample purposively rather than on a random basis was taken as, in a sample of this size, the latter method could easily fail to include students from infrequently occurring demographic groups. Students under nineteen years of age, for example, had comprised between 1% and 7% of learners studying units through the TVOLP the previous study period (Keepes et al., 1992) while the total number of Aboriginal participants in Australian higher education in 1991 was just under 5,000 (DEET, 1992a:1). Although particular demographic categories were selected for the sample, care was taken not to stereotype individuals on this basis. The evidence provided by each student was treated at face value. The intention behind the sampling criteria was to secure a sample containing a wide and topical diversity relevant to the study.

Students were assigned to the demographic categories of gender, disability, non-English- speaking background and Aboriginality or Torres Strait Islander status, on the basis of their own perceptions of their status in regard to these categories. The method of self-declaration was considered more likely to reflect characteristics of personal significance to learners than a researcher-defined classification based on pre-determined criteria. Self-declaration, together with supporting evidence, is accepted by the Department of Employment, Education and Training and used by higher education institutions with respect to Aboriginality (DEET, 1992a:1). For the purposes of the study, a background which was non-English-speaking was not differentiated from one in which English was a second language.

Classification of geographical location was undertaken using a combination of student perceptions (without distinction between rural and remote) and researcher assigned categorisation. For this latter purpose, the Commonwealth Department of Primary Industries and Energy classification of regions (Arundell, 1991, Appendix E) was used to classify students as either urban, rural or remote on the basis of their local government area. Although developed from 1986 Census data, this classification was the most recent available at the time. Urban and rural respondents whose perceptions matched the official categorisation of their area were selected. Remoteness was researcher assigned. Rurality and remoteness do not necessarily reflect a students relative isolation from a university campus. For this reason, students were also selected on the basis of responses to whether they lived within easy reach of a university.

With respect to socio-economic status, as this is both a complex (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1990:1) and sensitive statistic, no attempt was made to categorise individual respondents in this regard. As an alternative, respondents were selected from areas with varying socio-economic rankings on the basis of their postcodes and the Index of Socio-economic Disadvantage prepared by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. This criterion played only a minor role in sample selection. As the index reflects the statistical aggregate for each area, no assumptions as to individuals' socio-economic status were made. On the matter of age, as there was no commonly accepted definition of recent school leaver or mature-age student (DEET, 1990b:1), this study chose to regard learners who had completed their schooling in the last two years as school leavers.

The letter which was circulated to 925 students, or approximately one quarter of those registered at the time, served to negotiate consent, guarantee anonymity and obtain contact information as well as elicit responses as a basis for sample selection. The distribution of these letters was not within the researcher's direct control but at the discretion of OLA staff who, nevertheless, attempted a wide distribution while causing minimal disruption to the mailing process. Staff reported that letters were spread across successive mailing days during which registrations were processed on a first come, first served basis. The large number of invitations to participate in relation to the size of final, interview sample was a precaution against a low response rate and also designed to increase the likelihood that learners belonging to rare demographic groups could be included.

As things eventuated, the response rate to the letter inviting participation was 60% with 58% of these indicating a willingness to participate. This was adequate for the needs of the study and could even be considered high given the nature of the request being made. Follow-up procedures were not employed to stimulate a greater return of demographic information as the survey was essentially for sampling purposes. Respondents were located for all demographic categories designed for the sample although there was just one Aboriginal student. A number of cases of special interest to the study became apparent from these returns and these were also included in the sample. For example, one respondent was a prisoner, another had studied with the UKOU, others were continuing their studies from the TVOLP.

A demographic profile of the population of respondents to the invitation to participate was prepared using the statistical package, SPSS, and is available in Appendix C. This also records the demographic characteristics of the interviewed sample which, it should be recalled, was not designed to be statistically representative. No attempt was made to correlate the findings of the study with this demographic data because such an analysis was considered of limited benefit to the central task of understanding the meaning of open learning. The profile provides extensive, survey information to assist those who may wish to consider different aspects of this study or consider its implications for other settings[11].

The interviewed sample of 44 students provided data on learners' experiences as curriculum decision-makers in the Initiative. This was collected in a longitudinal, telephone interview approach in which each student was contacted three, and in some cases four or five[12], times[13]. As it was not possible to interview the prisoner by telephone, communication with this participant was undertaken by mail which proved to be far less informative.

Themes pertinent to the study were identified prior to the interviews and served as interview guides. These are reproduced in Appendix D. Interviews proceeded in an unstructured manner which allowed the conversation to flow from previous discussion without following a predetermined order or wording. Interviews were focussed by the prepared guides but these did not operate as standardised, interview schedules. The guides listed the themes to be explored, placed the data objectives of the researcher in clear focus and suggested useful words and phrases (see Patton, 1987:111). Respondents were encouraged to answer in their own terms and the researcher attempted to incorporate this style in subsequent questions. Participants' open responses were explored and clarified but categories of response were not predetermined.

In this way, the study attempted to strike a balance between the need for particular kinds of information and the need to understand learners' experiences from their own points of view (see Spradley, 1979:34). Because pre-conceptualised themes informed the line of questioning but did not pre-determine categories of response the technique is best characterised as a typographical analysis (see Goetz and LeCompte, 1983).

Conceptualisations developed from prior theory informed the interview themes in ways suggested by the conceptual framework and methodological assumptions. Thus, interviews focussed on learners' experiences as curriculum decision-makers and the suitability of the program for learners' needs. Students were regarded as rational agents whose intentional decisions and actions were informed by their personal knowledge of causally influential social structures and mechanisms. Access to learners' decision-making was available through retrospective accounts of curriculum decisions already taken and through discussion on future intentions regarding forthcoming decisions.

It is recognised that retrospective attributions (that is, reasons given after the event) may not be identical with real causes because of incomplete disclosure, outright dishonesty, the application of personal theories to explain behaviour, or the limitations of cognition about one's own decision processes, particularly over a passage of time (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977). Nevertheless, this source was the most feasible means of illuminating these decisions in the context of the study. Access to learners, prior to their deciding to study through OLA was not possible. On the other hand, participant observation during the study period would have necessitated limiting the size, scope and geographical distribution of the sample while still relying primarily on learners' accounts.

The initial round of interviews was conducted during weeks two and three of the study period after two pilot interviews to test and review the interview procedure and themes. The small window between the time of the mail-out and the start of the study period, precluded contact at an earlier time. As it was, responses were still being received as interviews proceeded.

The sample was selected by preparing lists suitable for each category and then proceeding with the interviews. Rather than persisting in attempting to contact a particular respondent, if one respondent could not be contacted, the next was selected and so on. This was done so that all interviewees could be contacted at approximately the same stage in the program. Late responses to the letter were scanned to boost unfilled demographic categories and were included in the overall profile of students but were not available for the initial selection which was made from 278 responses. Many students had yet to receive their study materials at this stage so their thinking remained relatively unaffected by such contact. Once contacted, interviewees were retained in the sample for the second and third phases of data collection. This provided a longitudinal perspective to learners' experiences and allowed prolonged contact to build rapport and confirm aspects of the data.

Initial interviews concentrated on learners' reasons for studying, their reasons for choosing to study through the OLI, their expectations of the program and their academic intentions. The second round of interviews, which was conducted in the concluding weeks of the thirteen week program, focussed on ongoing experiences and study decisions. In the final interview phase, learners again reported their ongoing experiences and were asked about their future study plans. They were also asked to reflect on the suitability and openness of the program in their experience. This final phase was initiated a month after the scheduled examination period to allow feedback from the assessment to be incorporated into the decision-making process. However, because of delays in receiving feedback, repeated calls were necessary in some cases.

Interviews were recorded with permission, transcribed and subsequently analysed with the assistance of the Nudist computer program. The program served primarily as a data management system facilitating the collation and retrieval of information on particular topics for further analysis. All student interview data was entered into the program and, using the line of text as the unit of retrieval, codes were assigned to passages of text to describe, exemplify and tag aspects of the data. The assigned codes were then further considered and either combined or sub-categorised in order to generate analytical concepts. The concepts derived through this process describe learners' curriculum decision-making in the Initiative. They are presented in the text, figures and tables of Chapter 6.

Data analysis proceeded by the use of initial typologies (e.g. Goetz and LeCompte, 1983) derived from the interview themes and from the conceptual framework. This was followed by categorisation reflecting recurrent themes in the data (Miles and Huberman, 1984:68). These categories were both indigenous (that is, derived from the words of participants) and analyst constructed (e.g. Patton, 1987:151). However, as students had little opportunity for interaction with each other, there appeared to be little culture indigenous to the students as a social grouping.

The data analysis, thus, involved a combination of inductive and deductive techniques for, while interview themes and initial data categorisation were derived from prior conceptualisations, deeper response categories were generated inductively. This strategy helped conserve research resources while facilitating development of the student perspective (e.g. Goetz and LeCompte, 1983; Miles and Huberman, 1984:27-8). The bias inherent in the use of deductively derived typologies is acknowledged, however, their use is justified because of their focussing potential and contribution to coherence. Where prior theory exists, this method is particularly useful (Strauss, 1987:27).

The data and categorisation scheme have both been preserved and categories significant to the arguement are encompassed within the tables of Chapter 6. A coding reliability index was not determined as the categorisation process served primarily for data management and as an aid to interpretation rather than as an end in itself. While coding reliability is sometimes used as an indicator of the trustworthiness of phenomenographic research, the logic of the inquiry, the appropriateness, effectiveness and comprehensiveness of the methods and theory employed, and the coherence of the final interpretation are also significant in considering overall quality.

The outcomes of this research process are reported in the remainder of the thesis and used as a springboard for interpreting open learning as a curriculum phenomenon.

3.9 Summary and conclusions

Three alternative philosophies for the conduct of social science research have been considered. Having discussed the naive realist philosophy of positivist science, relativist ontologies and pragmatism, the case for a modernised, realist-coherentist philosophy of social science was presented.

While knowledge, in this view, is considered to be a subjective, social construction, lacking infallible foundations, it is nevertheless considered to relate to real referents. This assumption allows that knowledge may be in error and that not all meaning constructions are equally valid. For realists, the task of science is to generate and assess explanatory models of the natural manner of acting of real entities.

Social structures and phenomena demonstrate their real character through their ability to produce effects, their pre-existence of individuals, their semi-enduring nature and their resilience to individual human wishes. The causes of social effects reside in human actions, intentions and reasons, in the unintended consequences of this action and in influential, contextual circumstances.

Thus, explanation in social science requires investigation of these causes through analysis of the verbal accounts of actors to gain an understanding of the participants' points of view. It also requires analysis of social conditions and historical antecedents to generate a level of understanding exceeding the knowledge of participants. Both of these require hermeneutic methods. Since meaning derives, at least in part, from prior conceptions, knowledge can never be created free of the bias of prior theory or discovered from observation alone. It can only ever be transformed. Prior theory has both an enabling and constraining influence on knowledge growth.

Whereas the physical world is impervious to our knowledge of it, the social world is potentially responsive to knowledge constructions of it. This makes social science an inherently critical and political enterprise. The OLI, being a political project, is in need of critical scrutiny precisely because of its transformatory potential.

While unassailable foundations for knowledge do not exist, the quality and trustworthiness of research are still matters of concern. In relativist philosophies, knowledge growth is a matter of consensus which leaves no logical grounds for theory assessment apart from negotiation. In this view, alternative conceptions are seen as incommensurable. Realist-coherentism, on the other hand, entails a unitary conception of knowledge in which paradigm theory is rejected as incoherent. In realist-coherentism, the relative worth of alternative knowledge claims is considered to be a matter, not only of empirical and technical adequacy, but also of supra-empirical virtues such as consistency with the total web of belief, comprehensiveness and explanatory power.

On the basis of these assumptions, this study seeks an understanding of open learning in the actions, intentions and plans of people, in social structures, contextual circumstances and their combined effects. The overall method is one of depth hermeneutics. This involves appreciation of participants' points of view from their verbal accounts and synthesis of evidence across three primary areas of investigation within a socio-historic perspective. The study generates evidence in the form of curriculum conceptions of open learning as social theory, intended curriculum and student experience. Analysis of the congruence between these conceptions is coupled with social and historical analysis to generate new meaning for open learning.

The methodology includes methods and techniques appropriate to each step. Theory on open learning is contained in documentary sources and examined through content analysis and review. The intended curriculum is also investigated primarily through analysis of documentary sources but this is supplemented by interview data from key informants who were people involved in implementing the OLI.

Data on learners' experiences as curriculum decision-makers derives from a longitudinal, telephone interview methodology with a purposive sample of voluntary participants. Forty-four learners studying through OLA were each interviewed at least three times except for one student who did not wish to continue after the first interview. The sample was designed with some prior knowledge of both the intentions of the Initiative and open learning theory in mind. It included learners from demographic groups under-represented in Australian higher education, learners with a range of educational backgrounds, learners isolated by geography and disability, and learners targeted by policy makers. Qualitative data from student interviews was analysed with the assistance of the NUDIST computer analysis program. Categorisation proceeded both deductively and inductively to facilitate research efficiency and achieve a balance between prior knowledge and empirical observation.

The research process sought to meet coherence criteria for validity and employed the principles of best practice recommended for qualitative research within the feasibility limits of the study. In conjunction with an appreciation of context, the evidence of theory, intended curriculum and student experience as revealed by these methods and assumptions informs the study's interpretation of open learning.

Endnotes

1. 'Paradigm' derives from the Greek, paradeigma, meaning a model or exemplar against which alternatives can be judged. Modern usage has been attributed to Kuhn (Barrow and Milburn, 1986:175).

2. The term, naturalistic, is used in this context as a contrast to positivism (e.g. Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As the same word also refers to the use of the methods of natural science in social research, it has two opposing meanings (Phillips, 1987:204) and will be avoided.

3. Compare with Rorty (1982:xxix) who regarded this approach as a futile attempt at metaphysical comfort with the status of mere intuition.

4. Liabilities are defined by Harré and Madden (1975:89) as passive rather than productive powers. Solubility is an example of a liability.

5. Bhaskar's (1978:21) terminology distinguishes between the transitive objects of knowledge or human, theoretical concepts, and their real referents (the intransitive objects of knowledge) which human knowledge is about. The extent of correspondence between the two can never be known.

6. Bhaskar's transformational model of society is compatible with Giddens (1981:172) concept of the duality of social structure in which structure (the rules and resources of society) is continually reproduced through the actions of people as they draw upon these rules and resources to act.

7. There are alternative theories which seek to avoid reliance on emergent properties (Knorr-Cetina, 1981:25).

8. Open systems do not meet the conditions for closure established by Bhaskar, namely that no new causal powers develop, that there is no change or qualitative variation in the object with causal powers and that there is a constant relationship between that object and significant conditions in its environment (Sayer, 1984:112).

9. For objections to the meaning-significance distinction and validation hermeneutics see Gadamer (1975 cited in Smith, J., 1990:174).

10. The distinction between registered and enrolled students has been explained by Moodie (1993a, 1993b) as a convenient fiction which engineers compliance with the requirement of the Higher Education Funding Act of 1988 that university students must not pay fees. OLA clients were not enrolled in an accredited, award course during their studies, did not pay university fees (OLA is a broker), were not funded under Commonwealth Grants for Higher Education, were exempted from HECS payments and could not, in the initial study period, defer payment as HECS could be deferred.

11. Demographic data on TVOLP students is available in Keepes, Sinclair, Ball, Harman and Kearns (1993). Similar data collected by the same authors on OLA registrants in 1993 is, to the author's knowledge, unpublished, however, Keepes (1993) provides a comparison of the two.

12. Additional contact was necessary in cases where slow assessment feedback was inhibiting learners' ongoing curriculum decision-making.

13. One student discontinued participation in the study after the first interview.

Chapter 4

THEORETICAL CONCEPTIONS OF OPEN LEARNING

4.1 Introduction

With the background, methodology and framework for analysis in place, the thesis moves to considering a range of evidence on the open learning phenomenon. The present chapter focusses on open learning as an element of social theory. It thus generates the first of three alternative curriculum conceptions of open learning specified by Element 1 of the framework (see page 34).

Although the intention of the framework is to examine the theory of open learning, it happens that the nature of formal theory on open learning is immature and encompasses a wide range of views. There are theoretical interpretations of distance education whose methods are evident in various open learning initiatives. There are theories about learning which are applicable to open learning. There is also some theorising on open learning itself but, in the main, the field has progressed little further than definitional and conceptual debate. Because of this, the chapter is essentially a review of the diverse, theoretical conceptions of open learning contained in the literature.

Yet even though the status of formal knowledge on open learning is questionable and its content contentious, it is important that this knowledge inform the analysis. In the first instance, the nature of the terms 'theory', 'philosophy' and 'ideology' are explored as a means of clarifying the status of knowledge claims about open learning. This also assists in bringing some conceptual order to the diversity of views. By recognising alternative purposes for theorising within a unitary conception of the nature of knowledge, theoretical conceptions of open learning are categorised as either descriptive, prescriptive or explanatory.

Specific theories within each category are then presented and reviewed. This provides a range of alternative, theoretical conceptions of open learning which will subsequently be compared with the intended curriculum of the OLI and the experiences of students in that program as part of the process of clarifying the meaning of open learning.

4.2 Theory on open learning

Open learning has proved to be a difficult concept to define (Carr, 1990; Kember and Murphy, 1990) let alone theorise and it should be recalled that this state of confusion underpins the necessity for conducting this study. Freeman (1990) commented that writers on the subject are prone to the Humpty-Dumpty syndrome. By this, he meant that they seemed to operate on a principle expressed in Lewis Carroll's *Through the looking glass*, namely that:

> When I use a word...it means just what I choose it to mean (Carroll, 1871 cited in Freeman, 1990:3).

Some writers treat open learning simply as an educational method bereft of philosophical foundations (e.g. Coffey, 1977 cited in Lewis, 1986; Kember and Murphy, 1990). Others see it in precisely the opposite way as a philosophical approach guided by a projected image of an ideal state (e.g. Boot and Hodgson, 1987; Freeman, 1990; MacKenzie et al., 1975:15; Snell, Hodgson and Mann, 1987). Others again, regard open learning as ideology (e.g. Edwards, 1991). This confusion may in part be attributable to diverging foci with either the theory or the practice of open learning taking centre stage. However, because of this divergence of views, because of basic disagreement about a philosophical basis to open learning and because of its alleged ideological function, there is a need to review all manner of theory, philosophy and ideology on this topic.

However, as some variance in meaning also attaches to the concepts of theory, philosophy and ideology themselves, it is valuable to consider the meaning of these terms before proceeding with the main task of the chapter.

4.2.1 The nature of theory

In Chapter 3, the nature of theory was mentioned, in passing, in two senses. In one sense, theory referred to the mental models we use to depict and explain relationships and causal tendencies at an abstract level (Bhaskar, 1978:12; Sayer, 1984:131). This relates theory to declarative knowledge. In a second sense, the word was used to refer to tacit knowledge and the extensive web of understandings which are inextricably embedded in everyday processes of communication and interpretation (Gee, 1990:15). This chapter is concerned with theory in the former sense although it is acknowledged that this relies on the latter.

Theories of declarative knowledge range in scope from personal interpretations of the world, to group understandings within a particular culture, to formal theories within scientific discourses, and to universally acknowledged truths (Evers, 1988, 1991; Smith, D., 1983a:5). The credibility assigned particular theory is also variable, leading to distinctions in meaning between constructs such as hypothesis, proposition, interpretation, law, theory and truth. For pragmatic reasons, the discussion which follows is confined to documented theorising which is of variable status. Since open learning policy-makers (academics, politicians and administrators) are significant participants in this formal discourse, this is expected to be a comprehensive and relevant source.

Beauchamp (1975:23,36-37 cited in Smith, D., 1983a:6) recognised that formal theories serve a number of functions. They are descriptive of the nature of things, explanatory as to why things should be as we observe them to be, and predictive of future events. They also serve as prescriptions or policy for human action. For this function, theory attempts to harness the potential of social theorising to sustain or alter existing social structures, practices or attitudes. Prescriptive theories are assemblages of accepted and hypothesised relationships between actions, outcomes and other causal influences. They not only predict outcomes and recommend interventions but also incorporate value assessments and moral judgements about those outcomes, the prescription as a whole and possible alternatives.

Prescriptive theories acknowledge the possibility of choice over potential action and reject a mechanistic, deterministic view of human behaviour. Their very existence attests to the fallibility of descriptive and explanatory theories as predictors of social affairs and points to the causal power of belief and intention. Since the complexity of open, social systems and the unpredictable nature of human action make forecasting inaccurate, perhaps the best that can be expected of social theory is full and accurate description, á posteriori explanation of past events and ethically sound prescription.

Within educational discourse, there has been a longstanding debate over the appropriate relationship between theory and practice (or action) (Kemmis and Fitzclarence, 1986:x). The debate reflects a broader philosophical debate on the relative merit of ideas and experience as a basis for knowledge, prescription and control (e.g. Gee, 1990:2-8). In education, concern has centred on the extent to which theory describes and explains practice and on how well practice is informed by theory (Kemmis and Fitzclarence, 1986:x). Within the epistemological framework followed here, this debate dissolves since it is seen to be based on a false dichotomy between observation and theory.

Distinctions between 'theory', 'philosophy' and 'ideology' can also be dissolved because of similarities in their meanings and on epistemolgical grounds. In the case of philosophy, normative philosophers are said to establish norms, standards and guidelines for the conduct of human affairs (Phillips, 1985:3860). This is prescriptive social theory.

Ideology is also used to link knowledge or belief and action and is used as either prescriptive or explanatory theory. Some authors use the term in a non-emotive, explanatory sense to refer to the role of ideas in maintaining social life and social structures (e.g. Gee, 1990:23; Kemmis and Fitzclarence, 1986:97). Gee (1990:23), for example, defines ideology as any tacit or overt social theory which involves or, has implications for, the way goods such as jobs, status or wealth are distributed in society. Other authors use the term in a strongly evaluative, as well as explanatory, manner as radical critique. Thus, ideology has been conceived, following Marx, as the false philosophies/consciousness promulgated by the ruling classes in the interests of maintaining power (Baum and Dickey, 1986b:371), as the systems of meaning which sustain domination and oppression (Thompson, 1984:132) and as the knowledge created, accepted or sustained by concealed, unacknowledged, illegitimate interests (Barnes, 1977:33). In this sense, ideology carries pejorative connotations which, at worst, align it with propaganda. Not uncommonly, the term is used as a means of discrediting alternative philosophies (Barnes, 1977:31) so that ideology is seen as something only other people adhere to and wrongly so (Gee, 1990:1). In this sense, it serves as prescriptive theory promoting a particular point of view.

The unitary conception of knowledge flowing from realist-coherentism, has the effect of dissolving distinctions between theory, philosophy and ideology. Since theories about ethics and values are knowledge claims like those in any other area of intellectual endeavour, such rigid separations cannot be sustained. Philosophy assumes the meaning it held for the ancient Greeks as the pursuit of knowledge in all areas of speculative thought, including science, the arts and religion (e.g. Baum and Dickey, 1986a:352).

Those who would distinguish ideology from philosophy or theory are undone, not by the content of their claims about the role of ideas in sustaining social stratification, but by the subjectivity, value-ladenness and political nature of all knowledge claims. In addition, they face difficulties of establishing the class origins and hegemonic functions of the philosophies in question (Griffin, 1983:34). There is also the disadvantage that focussing on the ruling classes may lead to neglect of the influence of other classes and to portrayal of curriculum development as a mechanistic process rather than a complex arena of continual, social tension (Simon, B., 1983:72-75,81). Theorists upholding the use of ideology have also tended to ignore the positive benefits of systems of belief in their efforts to focus attention on reforms they, themselves, value (Griffin, 1983:35).

Virtually all philosophies would seem to be amenable to both positive and repressive uses. For this reason and also because of the difficulties referred to above, no distinction between philosophy and ideology is attempted in this research. The position adopted is that the aim of research and formal theorising should be to make the positive and negative implications for all stakeholders (the political interests) as explicit as possible. It is convenient, nevertheless, to follow the popular usage of the term, philosophy, as a set of basic values and attitudes (Baum and Dickey, 1986a:352). The term, theory, is used for knowledge claims within formal, social scientific discourse while ideology is avoided except in quotations.

In summary, this thesis adopts a unitary conception of knowledge as a social construction but recognises four purposes for theory which may be descriptive, predictive, explanatory or prescriptive. It recognises no fundamental, epistemological distinction between theory, philosophy or ideology.

4.3 Literature conceptions of open learning

There is a wide range of views on open learning in the literature. These serve three of the four purposes of theory listed above as well as the purpose of classification and definition which is aligned to description. There are views of open learning which are pragmatically descriptive, views which are inspirationally prescriptive and views which are contextually explanatory. As far as detailing the relationships and values they encompass is concerned, the level of theoretical development is, generally, not well advanced which is, perhaps, to be expected given the present state of conceptual confusion.

Descriptive and prescriptive theories reflect a theory - practice dichotomy and consider open learning in a decontextualised or, at least, in a limited and uncritical manner. Descriptive theories are derived from examination of practice and focus on **what is**. While any description necessarily incorporates values and tacit theories (Gee, 1990:15), these generally remain unacknowledged. Prescriptive theories, on the other hand, are derived from value positions and used to advocate what open learning practice **should** be. However, such positions are generally not fully developed as credible, prescriptive theory or normative philosophy in the sense defined by Phillips (1985:3861) as they have yet to make their epistemological, ontological and meta-ethical assumptions explicit and have yet to fully elaborate and justify their goals and methods.

Explanatory theories go beyond description and seek to account for the open learning phenomenon within its socio-historic context. Although aimed at explanation, these theories too contain implications for practice and derive from particular philosophical orientations. As none of these existing explanations is found totally adequate, an original theory of open learning is developed in Chapter 7 as an outcome of the study. This new theory also focusses on explanation rather than description or prescription.

In the remainder of this chapter, theoretical conceptions of open learning are discussed according to these recognised purposes of theory. While this provides some organisational clarity, it obscures the degree to which specific theories may serve more than one of these functions. In turn, multi-purpose perspectives have the effect of making distinctions of purpose somewhat fuzzy. Nevertheless, this categorisation brings some order to the diversity of views.

4.3.1 Descriptive theory on open learning

In descriptive approaches, open learning is generally seen as a system of educational provision or **teaching and delivery mode** employing modern means of communication and curriculum structures which make study more flexible, accessible and student centred. Kember and Murphy (1990), for example, compared open learning with classroom, student-centred learning in a way which emphasised their functional conception of open learning and which explicitly denied that open learning is philosophically or theoretically driven:

> Open learning has largely resulted from social and political pressures, so has concentrated on removing participation barriers. Student-centred learning resulted from educational models or philosophies, so has striven to increase

> freedom and student initiative within classrooms (Kember and Murphy,1990:6).

Similarly, the often quoted definition by Coffey describes open learning as a learning system in which:

> the restrictions placed on students are under constant review and removed wherever possible. It incorporates the widest range of teaching strategies, in particular those using independent and individualised learning (Coffey, 1977:5).

Early descriptions of open learning, stressed opening **access** as the most important criterion of open learning (Lewis, 1990) and access remains as a key aspect of openness in later definitions (e.g. Freeman, 1990; Lewis, 1990; Peters, O., 1991:51). The emphasis in access-oriented definitions is on removing logistical and administrative barriers to participation. Through the use of distance teaching methodologies, flexible organisational procedures (e.g. attendance requirements) and less rigid curriculum policies (e.g. admissions policies), open learning is seen as extending study to those who might have found it difficult to study on-campus for any reason. These reasons include work and family commitments, physical distance from campus, and disability. In this conception, open learning is seen in terms of making education available at a convenient location and convenient time and pace.

Consideration of context in such definitions is limited, if it appears at all, to pragmatic consideration of current circumstances. Open learning is conceived in terms akin to natural selection. That is, as something of an adaptation to the needs of the current, social environment within present administrative constraints. Deeper analysis of the political forces at work and the social implications of the open learning response is lacking.

Possibly because administrative elements of openness vary across existing programs, while technology is frequently used to address openness, the distinctive feature of open learning is sometimes identified as the use of **technology** itself (e.g. Bosworth, 1991:1).

Open learning is also sometimes treated as a sub-set of educational practice within the field of distance education which is treated as a generic term for formal instruction in which "teacher and learner carry out their essential tasks apart" (e.g. Daniel, 1988:177). Open learning is distinguished by its lack of academic prerequisites for entry. In opposition to this view, Catchpole (1992) and Lundin, Sandery and Evans (1994:10) stressed that all forms of educational delivery are valid in open learning which can, thus, include face-to-face teaching as well as distance methods. From this perspective, distance education and conventional on-campus teaching would, by contrast, be considered sub-sets of open learning.

The Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (1989:7) accepted the definition of open learning used by the Manpower Services Commission of the United Kingdom. This linked open learning to **meeting learners' needs**. While this conception has glib, rhetorical appeal and overtones of openness, it presents difficulties when the concept of need is explored in greater detail or when the meeting of needs is to be put into effect. For example, questions about how needs should be defined and identified, as well as the issue of who decides, are problematic[1].

When the needs of interest centre on economic well being, the emphasis in defining open learning becomes human resources. In such **economically oriented** conceptualisations, open learning is seen as a cost efficient and flexible means of developing human capital for the benefit of the individual and society. As an example, the Commission on Open and Distance Higher Education in the European Community (1991:6) characterised open learning as an accessible, flexible means of providing workplace education and training. In the same vein, the Director-General of the Training Agency of the United Kingdom introduced the 1989 *Open Learning Directory* with the statement that:

> Open learning is essential for the future development of vocational education and training in this country. Indeed it is hard to envisage a future where access to skill training will not be increasingly simplified and improved by new learning methods and technologies. (Training Agency of the United Kingdom, 1989:ii).

Such conceptions place strong emphasis on contextual pressures necessitating ongoing professional development, education and training and regard initial education as no longer sufficient to equip people for working life and citizenship. The contextual reasons listed by the Commission on Open and Distance Higher Education in the European Community (1991:4) as a rationale for increased workplace education were global competitiveness, scientific and technological advance, skill shortages and an ageing workforce. In Australia, the so-called 'clever country' policies instigated by the Hawke Labor government were a response to perceived needs such as these. These policies were based on the premise that education is vital to national economic development and on an understanding that the responsibility for continuing education rested broadly with individuals, employers and governments representing the society as a whole (e.g. Dawkins, 1988b:34-35). They introduced mandatory, workplace, continuing education through the Training Guarantee but this was later abandonned.

Presenting continuing education as an educational good is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, the lifetime pursuit of wisdom and excellence was a goal of ancient Greek philosophers (Chaplin, 1977:3206). Distinctive in human capital conceptions, however, is an emphasis on vocationalism and economic rationalism rather than liberal education for development of the intellect, for its own sake or for the creative use of leisure.

Views on the nature of open learning which emphasise access through flexibility of place and time frequently display a **dissemination orientation** to knowledge acquisition although this is rarely made explicit. The assumption underpinning this orientation is that knowledge is a commodity, separable from people, to be stored or shared, bought and sold (Boot and Hodgson, 1987) created, managed, distributed and generally controlled by knowledge professionals.

In contrast with the early focus on access, more recent definitions of open learning have stressed its structural criterion of offering learners a **choice** (Lewis, 1990). The Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, for example, considered that:

> Open learning attempts to give students as much choice as possible to determine what one would like to study; considering one's own purposes in studying; to determine where and how one wants to study - on campus or at home, full time or part time, using various media, at one's own pace; to determine the level one wants to achieve and the ways in which and the times at which those assessments will be made (SCEET, 1989:7).

The choices referred to are curriculum choices of who, what, where, when, how and why learning takes place. The answers to those questions specify curriculum issues such as the timing, content, sequencing, manner and assessment of learning. Access can be incorporated into this schema as simply another dimension of choice for, when access is open, learners have the choice of entry (Freeman, 1990).

Open learning programs offering such choices and tailored to suit students in these ways have been labelled **learner centred** to contrast with institution-centred programs which require students to fit in with arrangements convenient for the educational provider (Lewis, 1986:5). The emphasis in learner- centred approaches is to:

> match instructional interventions....and provision of resources and conditions for dialogue, feedback and assessment of intended learning outcomes...as far as possible, to the learners' styles and needs (Burge, 1988:15).

Such a notion of choice is consistent with the idea of making educational provision flexible in order to meet learners' needs. It does not necessarily view choice in terms of learner control. Choice of timing, pace, mode, and method of instruction may simply be a means of facilitating flexibility. For example, Unwin and McAleese (1988:426) defined open learning as "a development from distance education... [describing] flexible learning systems which are student centred, seeking to allow people to study so far as possible at their own pace, where and when they want". Even where content modules are a matter of student choice, this may merely facilitate flexibility, individualised study and reproduction of preconstructed knowledge in a surface manner rather than encourage individual meaning-making, critical thinking and a deep approach to learning[2].

From a pragmatic point of view, opening curriculum choices has in the past, and continues, at the present time, to provide a workable means of subject selection in the face of burgeoning topic areas and heterogeneous applications for knowledge use. Historically, curriculum choices were opened in the latter half of the nineteenth century in the face of expanding subject knowledge (Dressel, 1963:3) under the influence of the realistic curriculum code. At that time new disciplines were added to the classical curriculum and it became impossible for any one student to study the entire undergraduate curriculum as had been the case before that time. A similar rationale linking the provision of choice in open learning to increasingly differentiated applications for knowledge and expanding curricular diversity has been explicitly acknowledged in the third principle of the open learning code of practice developed by the Manpower Services Commission in Britain. The principle reads:

> Bear in mind the range of learners who may wish to use your materials for different purposes, and build in features that will enable them to exercise maximum choice (Manpower Services Commission, no date:8).

Thus, allowing learners curriculum choices can be justified on pragmatic grounds and incorporated within a dissemination orientation resulting in what Boot and Hodgson (1987:6,15) referred to as "cafeteria-style", individualised learning programs. As these authors pointed out, opening curriculum choices does not necessarily imply a shift away from the dissemination orientation unless the choices serve to empower individuals to control the direction and content of their own learning.

In another approach, choice has been conceptualised in terms of **control** (e.g. Johnson, 1990a:4,1990b:69). The Open Learning Agency of British Columbia defined open learning in terms of learner control as:

> an instructional system in which many facets of the learning process are under the control of the individual learner who decides what and how to study, usually under some form of guidance (*Open learning and distance education in Canada*, 1989:1).

Although this definition specifically refers to learner control of curriculum, there is no clear indication whether learner centredness or learner empowerment is intended and the one does not necessarily imply the other (e.g. Burge, 1988). Control may be serving as a euphemism for choice however it contains the potential to convey an educational philosophy of empowerment.

Although opening choice can be justified on pragmatic grounds, shifting the focus of open learning from access to choice and to control, draws attention away from the "means by which education is achieved", as Rumble (1989a) would have it, to the "objectives and character of the educational process" or, in other words, from removing administrative and logistical constraints to removing educational and political ones. From this position, it is but a short step to consideration of what the character of open learning **should** be. Normative theorists take up this challenge and provide a prescriptive dimension to theorising on open learning. To some degree, descriptive theories are also prescriptive since they hold the characteristics they stress as the norm when not all programs called 'open' display those features.

4.3.2 Prescriptive theory on open learning

Prescriptive theorists promote open learning as a philosophically inspired approach to education. For them, open learning and indeed all non-traditional approaches to education are, as MacKenzie et al. (1975:15) believe, more attitudes than educational systems. In Freeman's words:

> [open learning is] an approach to meeting a need - a philosophy (Freeman, 1990:3).

Mitchell, Jasinski, Matchett, Burns and Rixon (1991) used a similar definition in the Australian context and accepted open learning as a philosophy of education based on the ideals of access and learner centredness. Another commentator expressing a forward looking, rather than past or present tense, descriptive view was Johnson (1990b:68-71). Although pragmatically oriented to learners' needs, Johnson's view related open learning to equity and predicted that it would revolutionise education by allowing students meaningful choices and **control** over curriculum, by expanding teachers' roles as learning managers and designers and through innovative, flexible, technologically enhanced, learning support systems. This view resonates with the philosophy of open educators of the 1960s, such as Rogers (1967).

Other authors extend the vision from learner control of curriculum to **learner empowerment**. The goal of open learning has been seen as:

> the empowerment of the individual as a learner by abandoning the form of education founded on transmission and instruction and embracing that which is founded on each individual's right of access to the creating and questioning of their own and other's meanings (Snell et al., 1987:161).

In this **developmental orientation** to open learning, the aim is to facilitate growth of the whole person and to encourage autonomy in learning (Boot and Hodgson, 1987:8). Neither the dissemination nor the developmental orientation is unique to open learning. Their application to this field represents a transposition and application of general learning and teaching theory to open learning. A transfer of ideas in the opposite direction, that is, from open learning to conventional education, has also been observed (Lundin, 1994 pers. com.).

Conceptualisations stressing autonomy, self-direction or learner control display a wide range of emphasis and vary from curriculum choice to learner empowerment. As noted above, Snell et al.'s (1987:161) version, and that of Boot and Hodgson (1987:8), fully embrace learner empowerment. O. Peters' (1991:51) vision of self-direction, on the other hand, amounts to curriculum selection by the learner as he/she develops a course of study.

While not specifically making any link with autonomy, Johnson (1990a:4) and *Open learning and distance education in Canada* (1989:1) conceptualised open learning in terms of learner control. Both contended that open learning means giving students control over their learning with respect to content as well as process, access and assessment. In these views, there is the suggestion that open learning involves a shift in the locus of control from institution and teacher to student. Such a transfer of control is a criterion of increasing learner self-direction (Candy, 1991:9). Thus, while these conceptions make no direct link between open learning and learner autonomy, there is extensive overlap between the two lines of thought.

Candy (1991:17) considered the shift in control from teacher to learner to be realised when the learner claimed ownership and ultimate authority over the educational endeavour, thus progressing from the realm of teacher-controlled instruction to autodidaxy. Because learner control is thought to be contingent upon learners' rights, resources and competencies (Candy, 1991:418; Garrison, D., 1989:26-29; Garrison, D., and Baynton, 1987), these were suggested as frames on learners' decision-making in this study as noted in Chapter 2.

Prescriptive theory of open learning sometimes incorporates the principles of **lifelong learning**. This may take the form of a pragmatic endorsement of continuing education in response to economic needs along the lines suggested by the Commission on Open and Distance Higher Education in the European Community (1991:4) as previously noted. Alternatively or as an adjunct, lifelong learning may be promoted as a leisure activity (e.g. *Open learning and distance education in Canada*, 1989:1). Faure (1972:162) extended a vision of a learning society in which machines could do for mankind what slavery had done for ancient Athenians, that is, establish learning and the search for knowledge as the aim and leisure activity of mankind, which was Aristotle's view (Chaplin, 1977:3206).

Projections such as this display idealistic zeal but are frequently promoted without comprehensive analysis of their origins, social functions or the likely implications of applying them to current systems. They need to be tempered by counter-arguments, such as those of Vinokur (1976:288), that the philosophy of lifelong education supports present systems of production and thus functions to maintain the current status quo rather than transform it. Projections such as Skager's (1984:6) display a definite economic functionality. Skager describes "a learning society in which opportunities to learn new skills and competencies as old ones become obsolescent are available to individuals of all social levels and backgrounds". Such functionality links educational ideals to economic circumstances as a response to the rapidly changing environment accompanying the so-called knowledge explosion and post-industrial society.

The ultimate vision of open learning, discussed by Snell et al. (1987:168), is as a means and educational philosophy supporting Freire's (1972:24) **emancipatory vision** for education and as the learning network of Illich's (1973:75-104) deschooled society. For Freire, disseminated knowledge could never be liberating, since, only when education is born of the creative efforts of learners, does this possibility exist. In a deschooled society such as Illich's, access to knowledge would be available without the usual processes of dissemination (Snell et al., 1987:169).

Technological advances, particularly in communications, make real time, egalitarian access to knowledge sources from almost any location a technically feasible proposition. Issues of cost aside, this could mean that formal knowledge might become freely available to serve a wide variety of needs and interests in an equitable manner. Thus, formal learning might no longer need to remain an isolated, institutionalised, elite function, compartmentalised into specific stages of the life cycle or to specific locations and times. Rather, it might become an everyday resource for any and all activities as well as for political enlightenment and the emancipation of mankind.

For such a vision to be anything other than idealistic, there is a need to show that it is both desirable and achievable by the mechanisms proposed and there are doubts on both counts. Practices associated with open learning such as learning packages which define objectives, content and outcomes may foster passive consumerism in learners (Rumble, 1989b:244 cited in Farnes, 1993). Furthermore, research suggests there is educational value in 'un-open' policies which pace, direct and motivate student learning (Daniel and Stroud, 1981). Openness in learning, taken to its logically, conceivable end-point in all dimensions could also prove to be both administratively unworkable and educationally undesirable (Lundin, 1994, pers. com.). The possibility of realising such a vision must also be questioned in the light of theory such as Foucault's which suggests that power relations are an inevitable component of all human interaction (Farrell, 1989:119). In addition, learning systems are subject to a variety of pressures which limit openness (Harris, 1988).

To date, tertiary programs which claim to be 'open' have been more successful in removing administrative constraints than in altering conventional, educational relationships (Carr, 1990). Even though the intention may be towards openness, political considerations, especially resource constraints, or unintentional effects may lead to closure, as compared with openness, and illusions of freedom so that:

> in the name of liberating the learner, there is a risk of merely modernising existing practice and subjecting the learner to more rational and individualised controls (Harris, 1988:14).

Harris (1988) has warned that without critical analysis, the provision of learner choice may not, in effect, give any real transfer of power to learners. While Harris' critical analysis of open learning alerts us to some of the latent issues involved in trying to achieve openness, Foucault's theory implies that openness is an essentially unobtainable goal. In addition, permitting learner choice may create an illusion of freedom while maintaining other forms of dependence arising from the learners' and their institutions' resources and capacities (Chene, 1983 cited in Garrison, D., 1989:26). Choice and learner control may also be thrust upon learners whether they want it or not.

Harris (1988) has also argued that many practices of open learning do little to alter the traditional, educational framework since conventional contexts are inhibitory. In the light of this, it may prove informative to examine understandings of open learning which set the phenomenon in context. In contrast to idealistic views, this approach alerts us to the possibility of less desirable futures based on open learning.

4.3.3 Explanatory theory on open learning

Contextualised approaches to interpretation seek to understand phenomena in relation to significant, socio-cultural conditions and events. This enables synthesis and integration of knowledge from different fields and a more comprehensive and coherent view. Open learning has been linked with a variety of contextual elements centred, most notably, around technological, political and economic developments. In most cases, however, the connections and theories have not been well elaborated. Distance education, on the other hand, has been more thoroughly theorised (see Keegan, 1990) and there has been some spillage of this theory onto open learning. This section considers explanatory theory which addresses open learning directly as well as that which has arisen from other areas of inquiry.

Focussing on technology, a number of authors have detailed **successive generations of technology** in educational communication at a distance. The first generation relied on the postal system, the second included telecommunications while the third generation is (or is thought will be) based on computer communications systems (e.g. Campion and Kelly, 1988; Garrison, D., 1985; Kaye and Rumble, 1991; Nipper, 1989 cited in Rumble, 1995:19). In relation to this succession of technologies, Farnes (1993) has identified open learning as a third generation distance education system. Whilst there is merit in observing the evolution of technologies employed in open learning and distance education, this approach, alone, does little to penetrate the complex nexus of change contributing to the educational developments.

From a political and economic perspective and in the Australian context, Campion and Guiton (1991) suggested that the introduction of open learning for university distance education represented a move towards **economic instrumentalism.** This entailed closer integration of education and the economy and more centralised control of higher education.

From an economic perspective, O. Peters (1983:95-111; 1993:39) interpreted distance education as an industrialised form of teaching employing automated, mass production techniques and organisational forms with cost structures and divisions of labour typical of industrialised production[3 4 5]. Parallels between distance education, in some of its forms, and industrialised processes can be seen in large, printing and distribution houses, course development and production by specialist teams, educational products which require large enrolments and relatively long shelf-lives for cost efficiency and the use of mass broadcasting and distribution facilities. To the extent that open learning also makes use of these industrialised methods, it too has been seen as **instructional industrialism** (e.g. Evans and Nation, 1992).

O. Peters' (1983:95-111) theory of distance education as industrialised teaching triggered a series of articles in the distance education and open learning literature in which comparisons between industrialisation and educational development were debated (e.g. Campion and Renner, 1992; Farnes, 1993; Keegan, 1990:105-115;

Sewart, 1992; Rumble, 1995). Perhaps inspired by this debate, Edwards (1991) interpreted open learning as the **post-Fordist**[6], approach to education and training. Some of the definitions of open learning previously discussed as descriptive or prescriptive theory also link open learning and the post-industrial context. For example, open learning has been seen as a means of meeting needs for ongoing education and training in the Information Age (e.g. Commission on Open and Distance Higher Education in the European Community, 1991:4; *Open learning and distance education in Canada*, 1989:1; Training Agency of the United Kingdom, 1989:ii).

In a similar approach and making similar conclusions about open learning, Farnes (1993) linked successive generations of technology in distance education to theory on the industrialisation of education. Successive modes of production in education were identified paralleling those in the ongoing development of economic systems from pre-industrial, to industrial, to Fordist, and then to post-Fordist production systems. In this scheme, open learning was classified as post-Fordist and linked to mass higher education.

The interpretations of both Edwards (1991) and Farnes (1993) are based on a conception of educational development as a mirror of industrial development. Campion and Guiton's (1991) interpretation of open learning in terms of economic instrumentalism, on the other hand, highlights the increasing co-option of education **for** economic development.

From a socio-economic perspective, both Harris (1988) and Edwards (1991) proposed a role for open learning in the **reproduction of the social relations of power and production**[7][8]. Without relating his ideas to the post-industrial context, Harris (1988) argued that offering choice in open learning may be a strategy which preserves present learner-trainer, worker-employer, power relations, while, at the same time, creating a mere illusion of a power shift by fostering a sense of involvement and control. Edwards (1991) made a similar suggestion with specific reference to the post-Fordist context. He argued that open learning assisted in maintaining existing power structures by providing a semblance of opportunity while at the same time personalising blame in the context of diminishing, employment opportunities.

Although critical of the nature and implications of open learning and establishing links with contextual circumstances which may be relevant, neither Harris (1988), Farnes (1993) nor Campion and Guiton (1991) offered elaborated accounts of the open learning phenomenon in relation to contemporary contexts. There is, in fact, a dearth of such theory. The most fully elaborated theory is that of Edwards (1991) which interprets open learning as the post-Fordist approach to education.

From the perspective of critical literacy, Gee and Lankshear (1995) also link open learning and post-industrial capitalism. These authors examined constructions of flexible, individualised, self-directed learning (open learning, in other words) in what they called "fast capitalist texts" and concluded that the rhetoric on these modes of learning in such texts was part of a **project aimed at prescribing, enacting and bringing into being a new work order** favourable to business interests.

Gee and Lankshear's (1995) work is a critique of contemporary, capitalist discourse rather than a theory of open learning. Nevertheless, it points to an alignment of the discourses of open learning and post-industrial capitalism and to an appropriation of open learning in the service of certain interests in a way which exploits the transformatory potential of social theory. Edwards (1991:38) has suggested that open learning plays a more active role in this process than that of the "progressive innocent appropriated", being, in effect, the post-Fordist solution to problems of education and training. This reflects his interpretation of open learning as a mirror of post-industrial modes of production and as a mechanism reinstantiating relations of power. It also contains an acceptance of the post-Fordist condition as he describes it but this version, as will be discussed shortly, is contestable (e.g. Campion and Renner, 1992; Rumble, 1995). Gee and Lankshear (1995), on the other hand, highlight the dynamic and strategic struggle involved in bringing imagined future contexts into being and in maintaining existing relations.

To recapitulate, open learning has been interpreted in terms of successive technologies (e.g. Farnes, 1993), economic instrumentalism (e.g. Campion and Guiton 1991), industrialisation (e.g. Edwards, 1991; Farnes, 1993), social reproduction (e.g. Edwards, 1991; Harris, 1988) and social transformation (e.g. Gee and Lankshear, 1995). The post-industrial context figures, or is implied, in most of these interpretations. The vision of the future projected by these interpretations stands in stark contrast to the emancipatory visions of the future discussed as prescriptive theory of open learning. If only for that reason, there is a need to explore theory relating open learning to the post-industrial context in greater detail. It is also necessary to assess the adequacy of such theory.

4.4 Open learning as the post-Fordist approach to education

Post-Fordism or post-industrialism refers to a new stage in an ongoing, economic transformation which advanced, capitalist nations are said to be experiencing in the latter part of the twentieth century. Although the post-Fordist debate is contested and different models of post-industrialism have been proposed (e.g. Campion and Renner, 1992; Rumble, 1995), the general story is as follows.

In post-industrial society, earlier, industrialised systems of mass production, standardisation, homogeneity and reliance upon manufacturing are being replaced by growth in tertiary, service industries (Jones, 1982:2-5). This is being accompanied by increasing diversity, differentiation and fragmentation of markets, rapid product changes and customised goods and services which require adaptable organisational forms and a flexible, multiskilled and continually retraining workforce in order to respond to market changes exercised through consumer choice (Edwards, 1991). Investment in technology and capital plant continues to substitute for labour, displacing workers and challenging current systems of wealth distribution (Jones, 1982:4,79). In this Information Age, technological development of rapid and powerful information, communication and control systems has facilitated changes in economic systems (Beniger, 1986:26; Edwards, 1991; Jones, 1982:6).

Edwards (1991) has theorised that open learning with its philosophies of meeting learners' needs and learner centredness is a manifestation of post-Fordism. It is serving to normalise the changes which are occurring and maintain social order during a period of rapid change. In this view, open learning assists in maintaining an appearance of employment opportunity when, in reality, full time, tenured job opportunities are in serious and permanent decline. In post-industrial society, qualifications are increasingly becoming a means of sorting and selecting labor, especially for high status positions, while the skill levels required for many jobs and the demand for labour, generally, is declining (Janne, 1976:151; Jones, 1982:159). By projecting the minority, full employment situation as the norm, individuals who are unsuccessful in gaining permanent, full-time employment are led to question their own skills and training.

Aronowitz and Giroux (1986:165) coined the phrase, ideology of opportunity, in discussing the functions of contemporary education. In effect, Edwards (1991) is suggesting that open learning is serving as such an **ideology of opportunity** in post-industrial contexts and transferring responsibility for an inevitable lack of success for many people from the state and from economic systems to the individual. This interpretation mirrors criticism of progressive, child-centred education which has also been cast as a legitimating "ideology" because of its failure to alter educational stratification and its intrusion into the social development of the child which has implications for social control (Musgrove, 1979:63).

Edwards' (1991) interpretation of open learning is supported by the parallels he draws between post-industrial, economic philosophies and practices and those of open learning. Both stress the need for lifelong education or reskilling as well as flexibility, choice and individual needs. In open learning, Edwards suggests, the learner exercises consumer choice to stimulate differentiation of the educational product in line with consumer needs. Thus, the learner centredness of open learning is cast as a manifestation of the product innovation and niche marketing occurring more generally as a feature of post-industrial capitalism. Open learning also meets employer needs for retraining in the post-industrial climate.

In a non-critical sense, open learning can be accepted as the post-industrial form of education and training on the grounds that the two are concurrent phenomena. Yet, Edwards (1991) was implying more than concurrence. He saw open learning structures as both deriving from post-industrial modes of production and serving to sustain the social relations which support it. On closer examination, such simple congruence is seen to be inadequate as an explanation of open learning.

4.4.1 Limitations of the post-Fordist interpretation

Field (1994) objected to accounts of open learning in terms of post-Fordism on the grounds that this view over-emphasises production and employment to the neglect of consumer culture. Rumble's (1995) criticisms are extensive and centre on the adequacy of production and labour market models from the automotive industry in America to describe, not only, economic organisation in general, but more particularly, trends in distance education.

The major flaw in Edwards' (1991) theory, identified in this study, lies in the conjunction of a limited, explanatory time frame and the existence of substantially similar, historical precedents to open learning prior to the period in question. The difficulty is that elements of open learning significant to Edwards' argument, such as learner centredness, choice, individualisation and self-direction, existed prior to the emergence of post-industrialism. They did so, not simply as individual elements which then coalesced in a new form as open learning but rather, as a coherent whole in the form of progressive education which substantially pre-dated the post-industrial era.

Edwards (1991:38) has acknowledged open learning to be a form of progressive education but, nevertheless, couched his explanation of the phenomenon in terms of post-industrialism. The timing of progressive, educational developments is critical to refuting Edwards' case but it is necessary, first, to confirm the essentially progressive nature of open learning.

4.4.2 Progressivism of open learning

Progressive pedagogy owes much to the thought and practice of the educational reformer and pragmatist philosopher, John Dewey (1859-1952) who built upon the work of humanistic and progressive educators before him to build curricula which would serve the needs of citizens in modern, democratic, nation states (Lundgren, 1983:27).

Progressive philosophy, and that of open learning, both draw on liberal, democratic, humanistic ideas prominent in contemporary, Western cultures. In this amalgam of philosophies, people are conceived as autonomous, rational decision-makers, responsible for their own actions, and entitled to make decisions in their own interest. In conjunction with psychological theory, these general philosophies inform educational theories in which learners are held to be responsible for, or encouraged to take charge of, their own learning. They also support prescriptive learning theory advocating that it is a worthwhile thing for students to be responsible for, and control, their own learning[9].

Autonomy, self-direction and self-actualisation were goals of earlier forms of progressive education (Chaplin, 1977:3218) and, in open learning, these ideals are most prominent in developmental orientations. Open learning is also consistent with philosophies of democracy and social justice in its learner centredness, its focus on meeting learners' needs and promotion of egalitarian access. For both pragmatic reasons and in accordance with liberal educational philosophy, both progressive pedagogy (e.g. Dewey, 1916:281,360) and open learning promote lifelong learning.

Progressive educationists regarded education as a way in which progressive improvements in society might be made (Lundgren, 1983:29). Theorists propounding prescriptive versions of open learning can be seen as continuing this progressive, reform tradition. Traditional tensions in common philosophy between concern for the individual and concern for the collective have coalesced in the notion of the free citizen in which what was considered good for the individual was also good for the state (Ramirez and Boli-Bennett, 1982:27). Through this mechanism, utilitarian concerns and pragmatic responsiveness to vocational, economic and social needs are encompassed within progressive, educational philosophies. Cohen and Mohl (1979:4) referred to this tension between social progressive reform and social efficiency as the paradox of progressive education.

In open learning, recommendations for extended educational participation, lifelong learning, flexible learning options and the efficient use of powerful and expansive teaching technologies can be seen to reflect pragmatic concerns. Tensions between pragmatic and idealistic views of open learning reflect the paradox of progressive education.

In progressive philosophies, learning is regarded as an individual process for which the knowledge of science, especially psychology, has increasing relevance (Lundgren, 1983:32). Educational practices and philosophies focussing on the individual are not new but have been developing since the seventeenth century. At that time, for example, John Locke (1632-1704) stressed the need to adapt teaching methods to the individual qualities and interests of the child. In centuries which followed, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) advocated education tailored to the development of the individual; Johann Pestazzoli (1746-1827) emphasised individual, lifelong needs for self-development; Johann Herbart (1776-1841) undertook formal analysis of effective learning and teaching; Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) focussed on an evolutionary process of development; Francis Parker (1837-1902) advocated teaching from the current abilities of the child (Cremin, 1962:130) and John Dewey elaborated his progressive, educational philosophy (Chaplin, 1977:3212-17).

Progressive educational theorists, Dewey included, approached education as an applied science and sought improvement through the application of experimental method (Baum and Dickey, 1986c:181). The findings of developmental and cognitive psychology informed pedagogies seeking to capitalise on natural processes of growth and motivation (Cremin, 1962:59). Open learning continues this focus on the individual and continues the technocratic approach to education through its learner centredness and through the use of scientific approaches to the design of individualised study packages.

On the basis of the many similarities noted above, open learning is established as a progressive pedagogy. Open learning is progressive in its learner centredness[10] [11], its focus on the individual, its humanistic[12] orientation, its pragmatic responsiveness to individual needs and the needs of democratic, industrialised societies, and in its instrumental use of scientific knowledge and rational approaches. Open learning contains traditional tensions between the liberal and the vocational, yet can be seen as a continuation of humanistic and progressive ideals.

In Edwards' (1991) theory, learner centredness is interpreted as a manifestation of post-industrial capitalism. However, this is a feature of progressive education in general and existed well before the era allegedly responsible for its development.

4.4.3 Time scale of progressive pedagogies

Progressive, student-centred pedagogy came to prominence from around the turn of the twentieth century following Dewey's influence (Baum and Dickey, 1986c:181) and flourished in two separate bursts prior to the onset of the post-industrial era (e.g. Aronowitz and Giroux, 1986:7). The first flourish occurred during the 1920s and 1930s, particularly in the USA (Donald and Myers, 1973:17; Nyquist and Hawes, 1972:87). The second emerged in the 1960s and continued into the 1970s with a variety of progressive forms such as free schools, open schools, open education and the informal approach developing in many countries (Stephens, 1974:12,27).

The post-industrial period, on the other hand, has made its presence felt from the 1970s onwards (Edwards, 1991; Jones, 1982:preface). This indicates that the social forces shaping major, progressive elements of the open learning phenomenon have been operative over a longer period of time than encompassed by post-industrial circumstances. Edwards' theory may, at best, account for differences between open learning and its progressive predecessors but cannot account for progressive practices and philosophies, evident in open learning predating this era. For this reason alone, Edwards' theory cannot be taken as a comprehensive interpretation of open learning.

On the analysis of the preceding section, student centredness must be counted as a pre-existing, rather than a novel, feature of open learning. This feature is a linchpin in Edwards' (1991) argument as it is taken as evidence of post-industrial, product differentiation and life cycles in response to consumer demand. It would be possible to accept Edwards' (1991) theory only if independence from historical precedents was assumed. That is, if it was assumed that learner centredness in open learning arose independently of student centredness in other forms of progressive education. Without that assumption, which would be difficult to justify, open learning is only open to interpretation in terms of post-industrialism to the extent to which it is novel to that era and this excludes its learner centredness, its focus on the individual, its humanistic orientation and technocratic approach.

The novel features of open learning are a theme to which the thesis returns in Chapter 7. In this section, the argument has emphasised the commonalities between open learning and previous, progressive forms of education. These establish historical precedents on the grounds of which Edwards' (1991) theory relating learner centredness to consumer-oriented, service-based post-Fordism must be regarded as inadequate.

The objections raised, however, do not challenge the suggestion implicit in the work of Harris (1988) and Gee and Lankshear (1995) as well as Edwards (1991) that open learning may be used as a means of legitimating existing power structures and influencing the distribution of wealth in society. It is with respect to this contention that the contested nature of the post-Fordist debate is relevant.

Badham and Mathews (1989 cited in Campion, 1993) distinguish between neo-Fordism and post-Fordism. Neo-Fordism involves an extension and continuation of the social relationships exhibited by industrialised society and the continued exploitation of labour by capital interests. Post-Fordism, on the other hand, has social progressive tendencies (Campion, 1993). In this 'ism', the need for worker autonomy and participation is emphasised and this is a move towards a real sharing of power, ownership and decision-making over production (Campion, 1993; Wood and Zurcher, 1988:22 cited in Peters, O., 1993:41).

It is argued that Fordist production systems and management structures - in which control is exercised through hierarchical decision structures and which lead to a deskilling, demotivation and disempowerment of workers - are no longer appropriate in the context of rapid change and global competition. While more participatory management structures are considered necessary for success in business, these changes also constitute a progressive, democratising force.

On this understanding, Edwards (1991) argument - and that of Harris (1988) and Gee and Lankshear (1995) - is essentially neo-Fordist, rather than post-Fordist as Edwards claimed. In neo-Fordist versions of the post-industrial context, open learning is cast as an exploitative ideology of opportunity. Within the context of the contested nature of post-Fordism, prescriptive theory which recognises the potential of open learning for emancipatory change can be identified as being in tune with progressive, post-Fordist versions of the post-industrial context.

4.5 Summary and conclusions

If any one single conclusion can be drawn from this review of open learning theory, it is that a unitary conception of open learning does not exist. There is not one body of theory against which the intentions and experiences of the Australian Open Learning Initiative may be compared but rather a range of views amongst which a match, or partial match, may be sought.

Theoretical conceptions of open learning were seen to serve a number of purposes and to range from the pragmatically descriptive to the idealistically prescriptive and the contextually sensitive. Each conception offered something of value but none appears totally adequate even if only because of the existence of alternative views.

Descriptive definitions derived from practice confront variable open learning programs and neglect significant bodies of thought attempting to integrate knowledge and values from diverse fields of endeavour to make recommendations for practice. By the same token, prescriptive conceptualisations are open to the criticism that they do not reflect present realities. Neither descriptive nor prescriptive theories reflect, to any great extent, on the broader context of open learning or the social interests that open learning philosophy and practice may serve.

Theories ranged from those in which open learning is seen, simply, as an educational method employing the latest communications technologies to provide post-compulsory education convenient for its clients, to those descriptive and prescriptive of open learning practices in terms of opening access and curriculum choices to varying degrees, those recognising a philosophical basis to open learning practice and others attempting to set the phenomenon in context.

Theory emphasising choice was also varied, the extent and kinds of choices to be opened reflecting opposing orientations to education as dissemination or as development. Disseminatory views tended to focus on access with choices providing flexibility. Developmental views tended to stress learner control or autonomy while varying from the liberal to the emancipatory. Where access and choice are implemented or proposed for economic reasons, open learning reflects economic rationalist, political agendas stressing the development of human capital.

The philosophical dimension of open learning, while not always demonstrable in practice, and while not acknowledged by all theorists, is well established in open learning discourse and probably accounts for much of the concept's appeal. For these reasons, it cannot be ignored by retreat to conceptualisations of open learning grounded solely in practice but must be considered as part of the phenomenon.

Contextualised interpretations of open learning link it variously to successive generations of technology, economic instrumentalism, industrialised teaching and post-industrial capitalism. The best developed of these explained open learning as the post-Fordist, or rather neo-Fordist, approach to education and training. This was based upon an interpretation of the learner-centredness of open learning as a manifestation of consumer-driven product specialisation typical of post-industrial production. This account was rejected as a comprehensive explanation of open learning on the grounds of substantial, historical precedents pre-dating the advent of post-industrialism. This theory was found to be limited to interpreting the present in terms of the present without attention to influences of the past.

The theory and philosophy supporting open learning has been confirmed as essentially progressive since it displays elements of pragmatism and a rational-scientific, technocratic approach, employs psychological learning theory, and displays a humanistic and democratic focus on the individual by virtue of its learner centredness. While post-Fordism is rejected as a comprehensive explanation of open learning, it is still possible that the post-industrial context may be significant in accounting for its novel features as a form of progressive education.

Interpretations of open learning in terms of context reflect, in large measure, more general theories concerning the industrialisation of education and concerning the role of education in reproducing and/or transforming the social relations of production in society. Such theories suggest that, in post-industrial contexts, the rhetoric of open learning may be co-opted as a means of normalising certain social, educational and economic changes without, necessarily, realising the potential of the ideals projected. They also suggest that open learning serves to legitimate existing power structures in a period of economic unrest and upheaval by seeming to provide educational opportunities while, in effect, deflecting blame for personal failures to individuals rather than governments or social systems. In contrast with this pessimistic outlook, prescriptive theories recognise a potential for real, as opposed to merely rhetorical, progressive, social change.

The conceptions of open learning reviewed in this chapter provide a range of possible interpretations to inform the analysis. They will be considered in the light of further evidence in the form of the intended curriculum of the Australian OLI, the experiences of learners undertaking the program, and contextual realities relevant to open learning. With respect to implementing the conceptual framework for the analysis, the curriculum conception of open learning as an element of social theory is now established.

Endnotes

1. With respect to adult education, Jarvis (1985:62-72) concluded 'need' to be a complex concept linked to a cluster of related terms: namely, wants, interests, and supply and demand. Dearden (1972:51) suggested educational needs exist when norms have not been achieved. This is a deficiency orientation. However, needs, wants and interests vary with social experience and social status (Jarvis, 1985:67). This opens questions about whose norms should be measured and how, and who decides. In the context of responding to need, Jarvis identified dangers that educational providers would either adopt a commercial orientation to the demands of consumers and offer programs likely to sell or, alternatively, become prescriptive by deciding what ought to be taught.

2. The distinction between surface and deep approaches to learning draws on a line of learning research stemming from Marton (1975) and extended by, for example, Biggs (1987) and Entwistle (1988). As used by Biggs (1987:2), 'approach to learning' is a concept which combines motive and strategy. In a surface approach, learners are primarily concerned with reproducing the information given, and gaining credit or credentials. In a deep approach, learners are motivated to construct understandings of intrinsic value to themselves and coherent with their own prior knowledge and experience.

3. Alternative conceptualisations of distance education stress autonomy, self-direction or independence (e.g. Moore, 1973, 1983:72-89), communication and interaction (e.g. Holmberg, 1981:12-13, 1983:114-122, 1986:123) and industrialised teaching and communication (e.g. Keegan, 1990:105-115). For reviews, see Holmberg (1981:25-40) and Keegan (1990:52).

4. Sewart (1992, 1993) and Rumble (1995) argue that contemporary forms of on-campus university teaching are also industrialised.

5. In contrast to this, Campion and Renner (1992) have argued that distance education in Australia was not industrialised.

6. Edwards (1991) theory can more accurately be called neo-Fordist. See page 129.

7. This reflects reproductive theses of education argued, for example, by Althusser (1971 cited in Porter, 1991) who focussed on relations of production, by Gintis (1972:84), Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) who focussed on class relations of production, and by Illich (1973) who stressed relations of consumption.

8. For a critique of reproductive theses of education see Aronowitz and Giroux (1986:146-148).

9. The literature on autonomy and self-direction is extensive and in a state of semantic confusion (Boud; 1988:17; Candy, 1991:6-8). Candy's analysis provides a useful overview.

10. Progressive pedagogy has been labelled variously as child centred (e.g. Stephens, 1974:12), person centred (e.g. Rogers, 1967:174) and student centred (e.g. Kember and Murphy, 1990). Open learning has been referred to as both student centred (e.g. Unwin and McAleese, 1988:426) and learner centred (e.g. Lewis, 1986:5). The distinction between student, child, person and learner centredness apparently relates to the learners targeted.

11. The philosophical bases of student-centred teaching have been identified by Fay (1988 cited in Kember and Murphy, 1990:6) as humanism, a focus on the individual and reliance on the understandings of psychology.

12. Humanism is a doctrine of concern for the affairs of man emphasising the dignity and worth of each individual (Nyquist and Hawes, 1972:82) and recognising people as rational beings with the capacity for truth and goodness (Baum and Dickey, 1986b:274). Humanism in learning stressed education for life and the development of the individual (Chaplin, 1977:3209).

Chapter 5

INTENTIONS SHAPING CURRICULUM FORMATION IN THE OLI

5.1 Introduction

Having dealt with theoretical conceptions of open learning in Chapter 4, the purpose of the present chapter is to detail the intended curriculum of the Australian Open Learning Initiative at the time of its instigation. This provides the second of the three curriculum conceptions of open learning to be applied to the Initiative in implementing the framework for analysis developed in Chapter 2. The OLI lays claim to openness in its title but this, in itself, conveys little about the nature of the program since theory on open learning is contentious. The title could be referring to any or none of a variety of different theoretical conceptualisations so there is a need to examine the curriculum intended in this instance.

As well as describing the intended curriculum, the chapter provides an understanding of broader issues and objectives shaping its development and the rationale behind specific intentions. An historical perspective is employed as a means of conveying the changes in intention which led to the eventual form of the Initiative, and as a means of presenting curriculum development on open university education in Australia within the broader context of change, particularly in higher education.

Through this historical analysis, the predominantly political and economically rationalist intentions driving the Initiative are revealed.

5.2 The intended curriculum

In accordance with the broad conception of curriculum adopted in Chapter 2 (see page 21), the intended curriculum is considered to entail all those structures, policies, practices, learning experiences and outcomes planned and established to enable student learning through the Initiative. In essence, this refers to the curriculum conceived and implemented by the initiative's originators, policy-makers and implementors. The intended curriculum is thus not confined to content or to the structuring of that content as an academic program.

Before tackling the central task of the chapter, it is necessary to identify those agencies which had control of, and responsibility for, curriculum formation in the Initiative. It is also necessary to consider the range and nature of intentions which impinged on the planned curriculum and which, therefore, needed to be encompassed by the study.

5.2.1 Intended by whom?

As outlined in Chapter 1, the OLI was instigated and administered by the Institutional Developments Branch of the Higher Education Division of the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training. Curriculum delivery in the Initiative was the responsibility of Open Learning Australia (OLAA/OLA, see pages 13-14), a company owned and incorporated by Monash University. The operations of OLA and the services it would provide were defined in a contractual agreement between this company and the Commonwealth Government. This specified that OLA would organise and coordinate curriculum delivery, not through the development of curriculum materials on its own account, but as a broker, through contractual arrangements with established universities and in conjunction with the (ABC).

Overall responsibility for curriculum development in the Initiative therefore resided with Commonwealth administrators, federal politicians (particularly ministers with responsibility for higher education), OLA, participating university providers, the broadcaster and advisers. Evidence will show that, of these, it was the Commonwealth government through its Department of Employment, Education and Training which played the controlling role in curriculum formation and in deciding major, structural features of the intended curriculum. In so doing, the Commonwealth established a number of constraints and set many of the frames within which providers made curriculum decisions and all of these established the frames within which learners made their curriculum decisions.

As was the case in the establishment of the Open University in the UK and the Open Learning Agency in British Columbia (e.g. Latchem, 1991), launching the OLI as a permanent feature of the higher educational landscape in Australia required an exercise of political will and commitment to realise the intention. It is unlikely that without such commitment at the federal level a project of such scale and national reach could have been implemented. This commitment highlights a longer term trend of increasing Commonwealth government control of higher education through its acceptance and exercise of fiscal responsibility. In the mechanisms and structures of the Initiative, means of furthering this trend are discernible[1]. The Commonwealth exercised control by directing policy in a system in which responsibility for curriculum delivery, nevertheless, remained an institutional matter and financing was increasingly relegated to the market economy and student end-users.

5.2.2 The approach of the chapter

Given the nature and scale of the OLI, it would have been surprising if student-oriented curriculum intentions had not been planned in accordance with the broader agendas of the policy makers. The Commonwealth government, for example, needed to develop policy on higher education which took account of the implications this might have for other areas of its responsibility as well as the political ramifications such policy shifts might have for the broad electorate. In their turn, the universities and the ABC needed to implement their own corporate missions of which open learning was just one part.

Thus, policy makers were concerned to achieve a range of objectives which extended beyond curriculum to encompass self-interest, corporate benefit and the public good. What is more, curriculum objectives planned through the Initiative targeted system-wide objectives for higher education, perhaps more than the specific needs of Open Learning students. This meant that the curriculum was influenced by intentions which were not strictly curricular and also by curriculum intentions for higher education as a whole. It was also a matter of negotiating the competing interests of responsible agents and reconciling conflicting intentions. In effect, a wide range of intentions impinged on the Initiative and needed to be taken into account in the study. To the extent that these are known, all relevant intentions are included.

Another feature of the Initiative which has a bearing on the approach of this chapter is that policy development and implementation occurred simultaneously. Because of this, the curriculum was somewhat fluid and undefined at the time of the study and a matter of contingency as well as intention. In order to allow these ongoing changes and influences to unfold and be elaborated in context, an historical approach is employed in presenting the intended curriculum. The story is set against the history of increasing Commonwealth government involvement in Australian higher education and focusses on distance education.

5.3 Historical background of increasing centralised control

At federation, education was a constitutional responsibility of the states and this remains the situation at the present time. Nevertheless, in contrast to the early arrangements, financial responsibility for higher education is currently a responsibility of the Commonwealth government. This has been the case since the 1970s (DEET, 1993a:13). A significant role for the federal government in policy formation is associated with this. Substantial Commonwealth involvement began with grants to universities for research prior to the second World War and for other specific purposes such as libraries in 1951.

Following the recommendations of the 1957 Murray Report, the Commonwealth's early commitment to higher education was placed on a firmer footing when the Menzies government agreed to match funding for universities with the states on a permanent basis (Tomlinson, 1976:35). The Universities Commission was set up to administer this new Commonwealth interest. At that stage, external studies was an established, but nevertheless, marginal and peripheral (Campion and Kelly, 1988) element in university provision intended to serve a geographically dispersed and scantily populated continent (Committee on Australian Universities [Murray Report], 1957:121). The mode attracted no special interest from politicians in Canberra or even from a majority of academics.

Acceptance of financial responsibility was, quite understandably, associated with concern and intention to constrain expenditure, especially in an environment of increasing educational participation as has been the case since that time. In the sixties, cost efficiencies presumed attributable to distance education had yet to be appreciated and, in contrast to later developments, the Commission on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia proposed in 1964 in the Martin Report to limit burgeoning expenditure (Davies, 1989:28) through structural intervention in the system rather than through manipulation of teaching methods themselves. This Report established a binary system of higher education consisting of universities and Colleges of Advanced Education with differential funding, roles and administration.

While advocating the use of television for both intra and extra-mural teaching, the Report (Commission on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia [Martin Report], 1964:94) expressed the opinion that:

> the demand for external study...[would] diminish as steps are taken to remove the conditions that make [it] necessary (Martin Report, 1964:81).

Rather than recommending an expansion in university provision of external studies, this Report recommended that any further growth of that mode be in the college sector since it was of the opinion that external studies was not a university function (Martin Report, 1964:10).

Campion and Kelly (1988) have identified three phases in the provision of off-campus university teaching in Australia. During the initial **external studies phase**, which extended from its introduction at the University of Queensland in 1911 until the early seventies, extramural students were taught by academics without any significant input from specialists in distance teaching methods. In the sixties, although external study was considered necessary for country students, there was general concern about poor completion rates in all forms of part-time and extramural modes of study (White, 1982). The attitude of the Martin Report was that external university study was something of a necessary evil in Australia. In England at that time, it was strongly held that a university education required full time, residential attendance and liberal or professional studies (Ellwood, 1976:46). The demands of women and working people for means of studying part-time and for studying without residential attendance had been largely ignored since Victorian times (Marriott, 1981:1,4). Exceptions were the establishment of the external London degree and Birbeck College for part-time students. In Australia, provision for off-campus studies was available. However, this mode did not, at that time, and perhaps does not even yet, enjoy full parity of esteem with on-campus courses (Jevons, 1984).

For Britain, the Open University, which commenced operations in 1971 (Perry, W., 1977:3100), represented a revolutionary, political intervention at national level in the provision of higher education. The early success of this university sparked interest in Australia in a similar venture. In 1973, the Whitlam government honoured its pledge to take over full financial responsibility for higher education and make university access more egalitarian through the abolition of fees (Karmel, 1989:3). In this climate, the Committee on Open University, chaired by Karmel, was established to investigate opportunities for opening up university study.

Both the final report of the Committee on Open University - known as the Karmel Report (1974:99) - and Faulk and Anwyl (1973:91) in their report on the desirability and feasibility of an Australian open-type university, identified the potential of introducing a number of 'open' features such as open entry, innovative delivery methods and credit transfer to the Australian scene. Neither, however, favoured the establishment of a new, open university in Australia following the British model and this idea was subsequently rejected by the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) in the Hudson Report on the grounds of cost and damage to the viability of existing regional providers which would need to be displaced for its survival (CTEC [Hudson Report], 1986:14). On the issue of national television delivery, the Karmel Report (1974:98) stated specifically that this "would be neither desirable on educational grounds nor feasible on technical grounds".

In contrast to their lack of support for a new open university, the two reports saw advantages in a coordinated approach to developing a stock of nationally accessible courses (Faulk and Anwyl, 1973:91; Karmel Report, 1974:99). The themes of coordination and cost efficiency, in the form of avoiding wasteful duplication, were soon taken up by Commonwealth funding authorities but with little effect for more than a decade. They remained prominent themes throughout that time and continue as potent motivating intentions shaping higher education decision-making at the current time.

Initially, interest in coordination was exercised with respect to administration of the higher education sector in general. This occurred, for example, through the establishment of a single administrative body, the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, to replace the separate commissions in 1977 (Davies, 1989:164) and a wave of mergers in the early eighties (Karmel, 1989:4). The proliferation of distance education providers from six in 1970 (Dawkins, 1987a:73) to around forty in 1985 (Hudson Report, 1986:1,48) brought the spotlight of rationalisation firmly onto the distance arena of higher education.

Throughout the seventies, growth in distance education had proceeded well ahead of the overall rate of growth in higher education. Expansion in external provision occurred principally in Colleges of Advanced Education but also in universities as a means of maintaining enrolments during a period of their falling attractiveness to school leavers (Hopper, 1980:68; Hudson Report, 1986:73; Johnson, in press). The uncoordinated proliferation of small providers came to be seen as a problem (Campion and Kelly 1988; Johnson, in press) for which rationalisation of the number of providers was the remedy prescribed by two subsequent reports, namely the Hudson Report (1986:7-15) and that of Johnson (1983a:29). The problem was one of both quality and economy for, not only were large enrolments considered necessary for efficient provision, but conversely, small providers could not afford top quality provision (Johnson, 9.11.1994, pers. com.).

To achieve rationalisation, Johnson advocated a mechanism of self-regulation by providers to be supported by CTEC (Johnson, in press). Possible alternatives such as a CTEC standing committee and coordination on a state basis either posed serious difficulties or offered limited potential for improvement. However, as the Commission declined to support Johnson's proposal, some providers established their own coordinating mechanisms in the form of the Toowoomba Accord of university distance providers and a similar body for Colleges of Advanced Education (Johnson, in press). Johnson (in press) recorded that, although little progress was made on reducing duplication of course offerings, a system for cross-crediting Accord partners' courses was set in place. CTEC established a Standing Committee on External Studies (SCES) which in 1987 proposed rationalisation based on a system of principal and specialist providers (Johnson, in press). This proposal carried forward ideas promoted in the Review of Efficiency and Effectiveness and derived from a model used by the Victorian Post-Secondary Education Commission (Johnson, 9.11.1994, pers. com.).

Between the early seventies and the mid-eighties, off-campus provision was in its **distance education phase** in which considerable attention and expertise went into course design to produce courses and materials especially suited for the distant student (Campion and Kelly, 1988).

By the late seventies, deterioration in the Australian economy had led to sharp reductions in the levels of funding for higher education and heightened interest in coordination and efficiency (Karmel, 1989:4). Rising levels of unemployment, especially youth unemployment, were of concern. The Hawke Labor government encouraged growth in educational participation through student assistance schemes such as AUSTUDY but without similar increases in expenditure on higher education (Karmel, 1989:5). Productivity increases were sought across virtually every field of the economy and reinforced by award restructuring linking worker benefits to productivity.

In this context, education also came to be seen as an industry to which productivity principles should be applied. Concern about the efficiency of education together with an intention of achieving more for less led via a series of reports and reviews[2] to Commonwealth intervention in the overall management of higher education in a major restructuring announced in 1988.

The Commonwealth moved to restructure higher education shortly after the 1986 Review of Efficiency and Effectiveness in Higher Education (Hudson Report, 1986). The documents commonly referred to as the Green (Dawkins, 1987a) and White (Dawkins, 1988a) papers heralded changes intended to introduce a rationalised and coordinated national system of higher education. This Unified National System of Higher Education was to be under direct ministerial control via the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training rather than the responsibility of a statutory commission as had previously been the case.

By combining responsibilities for education, employment and training in a single department directly answerable to the minister, the government intended to improve the responsiveness of education to economic needs and to manage the education industry more efficiently (Dawkins, 1987a:1-2,47, 1988a:73, 1990b:4).

Increasingly, a user-pays orientation in which the beneficiaries of education were held to be responsible for its costs was introduced (e.g. Dawkins and Holding, 1987:19). With respect to higher education, the Committee on Higher Education Funding (1988:xi), chaired by Wran, concurred that users should contribute to its cost. Charges for higher education were reintroduced in 1987 (Higher Education Administration Charge Monitoring Committee [HEAC], 1987:1) under semantic cover as an administration charge rather than a fee for tuition. The Higher Education Contribution Scheme replacing this in 1989 required students to pay around 20% of the costs of their higher education (Dawkins, 1988c:6).

Manpower needs, labour market forces and economic circumstances were not new influences on the funding and regulation of higher education. As an example, the need for professional labour had been a significant influence in the fifties (White, 1982:268). In the past, however, regulation had been undertaken at arm's length as the portfolio had been administered through government authorities with responsibility for higher education such as the Universities Commission and, later, the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission. Intentions of generating greater efficiency and responsiveness were, in the eighties, to be realised through more direct government regulation even though increased responsiveness to market forces was espoused. A wave of mergers within the higher education sector was prompted by the Dawkins reforms (Karmel, 1989:9,11).

The Hudson Report (1986:233,149) had been wary of predicting the extent of cost savings which might be achievable through the rationalisation of distance study and, in fact, suggested that the use of new technologies could escalate rather than reduce costs. There was a danger that unequivocal evidence of cost efficiency could precipitate cuts in funding. In the restructuring, the Commonwealth followed Johnson's (1983) advice and used its funding control overtly (Dawkins, 1988a:49). A structural intervention to reduce the number of distance providers was intended. Eight providers were eventually designated as Distance Education Centres (DECs). These were the same institutions proposed as principal providers three years earlier by the SCES (Johnson, in press). Other universities who wished to remain in external provision were required to make contractual arrangements with a DEC for course development and production in exchange for a set proportion of the available funding[3].

In assessing the institutions to be designated as DECs, an institutional base size of 3,000 distance enrolments[4] was adopted (Dawkins, 1988a:50). Consideration was also given to quality in terms of the specialist facilities available for distance provision but not course content (Johnson, 9.11.1994, pers. com.; Nunan and Calvert, 1991:397). The assessment team noted a need for improvement in the quality of student support (Joint DEET - Higher Education Council Assessment team, 1989 cited in Nunan and Calvert, 1991).

The primary intentions behind this restructuring of distance education were related to quality and cost efficiency. Small providers of commonly available courses were being encouraged to cease this activity for those reasons (Johnson, 9.11.1994, pers. com.). One rationale involved avoiding unnecessary duplication and capitalising on economies of scale. There was also a rationale of improving the quality of distance courses, building centres of excellence and expertise (Dawkins, 1987a:36; 1988a:49). While the Hudson Report (1986:233) had voiced an imperative that any savings from a rationalisation of distance study be used to improve the quality of higher education, Dawkins (1988a:51) foreshadowed an intention to reduce the rate of funding for external students.

These changes to distance education were part of a wider campaign of reform in higher education which, in turn, was linked to reform spanning the entire employment, education and training portfolio (Dawkins, 1988a:1). It is somewhat ironical that, by this time, distance provision had evolved in such a way as to make the changes somewhat inappropriate. The advent of desk top publishing provided an alternative cost structure for print production allowing efficient production of smaller print volumes (*Open learning and distance education in Canada*, 1989:8). New communications technologies were increasingly being used for both on and off-campus students. In effect, off-campus provision was moving into its third, **open learning phase** in which the methods of distance educators were beginning to enhance and streamline on-campus teaching (Campion and Kelly, 1988). Distance methods were becoming less a specialism for external students, less a deficit model of providing for students who could not attend on-campus and more an effective and efficient means of serving students in all modes.

5.4 Technological innovation: The television open learning trial

Within this restructured higher distance education environment, there was an interest in exploring the use of communications technologies, particularly television, as a means of delivering higher education (Moodie, 1991). The Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training had recommended that:

> the scope for the use of new technology in distance education be investigated in view of the proposed reduction in the number of providers, the extension of the courses overseas, and the need to improve student progress rates (SCEET, 1988:32).

There was also an intention of developing the expertise and facilities of the DEC system. The Commonwealth supported a trial of voice mail (King, 1992), allocated $3.27 million to establish videoconferencing and supported other technological developments in the DECs (Baldwin, 1991a:36,80; Dawkins, 1990a:70).

The Television Open Learning Project was originally proposed as an initiative for the 1990 election but was not taken up at that time (Johnson, 9.11.1994, pers. com.). Moodie (1992b) reported that a number of proposals had been circulating within DEET during Dawkins' period as minister and that television open learning surfaced with the encouragement of Minister Baldwin. The project was specifically intended to "test the viability of using television to increase access and diversity within the education system" (Baldwin, 1992b:1). In particular, it was proposed as a trial of the use of television for extending access to higher education in isolated areas (Baldwin, 1990 cited in Moodie, 1991).

Previous attempts to use television for higher education, such as the university of the air in 1961 and the Learning Network in 1987, had received little support and had been discontinued[5].

5.4.1 Television delivery

The television open learning trial was announced as part of the 1990-1 budget statement. Because this project set the stage for the OLI which followed, its curriculum intentions are discussed in detail.

Curriculum delivery via television was an original intention of the project and integral to the conception of the project. The central concern appears to be how electronic communications, particularly **television**, could be used in educational provision rather than how educational problems, including more equitable and extensive access, could be addressed. Political commitment to the use of television for higher education was slow in developing as argument within DEET about the relative merits of television for higher education or for the teaching of literacy and other basic competencies, delayed implementation of the project (Moodie, 1991).

In keeping with its intention of fostering expertise in the DECs, DEET initially intended to implement the project via members of the National Distance Education Conference[6] (NDEC) but on NDEC's advice invitations to bid for the project were opened to all higher education institutions (National Distance Education Conference [NDEC], 1990).

Almost before the dust had settled on the DEC rationalisation, the Commonwealth appeared to realise the potential of open learning methods for all university teaching (Baldwin, 1991b:46)[7]. Commonwealth interest in technological solutions strengthened. Innovation in higher education by technological means was encouraged through seed funding and by allowing capital substitution of investment in technology to replace conventional capital programs (Baldwin, 1991b:47). A comprehensive Review of Alternative Modes of Delivery (later published as NBEET, 1992) which included the TVOLP was also instigated (Baldwin, 1991b:46).

5.4.2 Open access and increased participation

An intention of **opening access** soon supplanted technological innovation as the overt rationale for the project. The access theme was emphasised in a circular letter from DEET to NDEC following the budget announcement (Moodie, 1991) and was developed further in the invitation for proposals for the Project. In a media release, the minister linked the aims of the project to access and equity by expressing the aims of the project as being:

> to extend access to people who are unable to attend on-campus courses because of work or family commitments, disability or because they live in isolated areas (Baldwin, 1991c:2).

The Department also sought to encourage those who had not previously thought of participating in higher education to sample it.

> The project is also intended to provide a 'taste' of higher education, through the television programs, to those in the community who would not normally consider enrolling in a higher education institution. (Milligan, 1991 cited in Moodie, 1991:4).

The intentions behind attracting new market segments to open learning are uncertain. Perhaps an extended audience was sought in the interests of project viability, that is, as fodder for the development of technology; perhaps the project was seen as a means of improving Australia's OECD ranking with respect to adult participation in higher education, a matter over which the Green Paper had expressed concern[8] (Dawkins, 1987a:9); perhaps there was a concern for equity of participation. Possibly, increasing adult participation was linked to the notion of Australia as the clever country with ongoing needs for education and training (e.g. Dawkins, 1990b:4-5,13).

Whatever the reason, **open entry** was an early intention of the television trial and this was formally specified in the tender invitation. Units were to be offered to all students regardless of location or prior educational attainment. As a consequence of this intention, the units on offer had to be introductory units requiring no previous background in the subject and capable of being undertaken from anywhere in Australia without campus residential requirements.

The TVOLP offered seven introductory first year units in 1992[9]. In keeping with the intention of encouraging people to sample higher education, DEET required that three levels of educational engagement be made available to students (Milligan, 1991). Students could simply watch the programs, they could purchase the study materials accompanying the units or they could opt to complete the assessment for the units for an additional charge (Keepes, Sinclair, Ball, Harman, and Kearns, 1993:10-3; TVOLP Consortium, 1991:5).

The winning consortium of universities proposed broadcasting via the ABC to enable access via its national reach (Moodie, 1992b). Additional benefits of this 'partnership' were free, national coverage and promotion of the Project as well as access to the program development resources of the ABC (Moodie, 1992b).

5.4.3 Broadcast quality and an 'add-on' pedagogy

The role of television in the project was conceptualised as primarily concerned with access rather than the delivery of course content. Television would be used to engage interest and sustain access while the mainstay of curriculum delivery would be print (Moodie, 1991)[10].

Representatives of the ABC saw two alternative approaches to educational television only one of which was acceptable and consistent with the ABC's objectives (Collis-George, 28.5.93 pers. com.; Gelonesi, 28.5.93. pers. com.). In 'big E' Educational Television (with capitals), enrolled students are regarded as the primary audience and programs may employ a low cost, didactic, lecture-based style. This approach is used successfully on television channels dedicated to education and is employed extensively in the United States and Canada. On the other hand, 'little e' educational television (without capitals) refers to general, educational television intended to provide intellectually stimulating entertainment for a general audience.

The mission of the ABC, as explained by its representatives, was to serve the wider, viewing public and attract audiences who, the ratings indicated, were tired of educational programming. Viewers were thought to appreciate good television which meant being informative without seeming to be didactic. The ABC insisted that the television curriculum exhibit high production values (Moodie, 1991), minimise segments relying on 'talking heads' and lean towards 'little e' educational television.

In negotiating the competing interests involved, TVOLP management considered conceding to the ABC on production quality to be compensated by free, national broadcast coverage, use of the program development resources of the ABC and promotion of television open learning (Moodie, 1992b; OLAA, 1993a). Through these means intentions of access and project viability would be fostered.

The decision to use television programs of **high production quality** influenced selection of the pedagogic strategy linking television components of the course to the main body of learning materials. In conjunction with additional constraints, such as the level of funding available and the Commonwealth requirement that pre-existing materials be used, this quality specification led to an **'add-on' strategy** (Moodie, 1991) in which overseas productions comprised the bulk of the television content and locally produced segments, program notes and study guides were used to unite the purchased television product with the study packages[11].

The use of 'little e' educational television also meant that close integration of text and broadcast components was not possible and the project was criticised for deriving its educational values and assumptions from the broadcasting industry which is dependent on viewing ratings (Walker, R., 1992). An alternative approach, suggested by R. Walker (1993, pers. com.), was to use video-cassettes, however this approach would not have accorded with DEET's intention of extending access and equity by providing a taste of university study to non-traditional users of higher education.

The loose pedagogical relation between television and text in the TVOLP was considered more likely to enhance the prospect of credit recognition for open learning units (Moodie, 1991) since, in general, the television component would support units also offered and accepted in established modes.

Significantly, the 'add on' strategy[12] was also far cheaper and less time consuming, thus contributing to the realisation of intentions of cost efficiency, conforming to funding frames and enabling units to come on stream within the specified time.

In order to secure broadcast material for the project adequate in volume, quality and Australian content, a policy of buying and adapting the best from overseas, and investing a smaller proportion of funds into the production of medium quality Australian productions was adopted (Collis-George, 28.5.93, pers. com.). The broadcast rights for high quality overseas productions could be obtained more cheaply than producing low or even medium quality programs locally. Two series, *Images of Australia* and *The Unique Continent*, were produced for the TVOLP and screened in the year of the trial (1992). Another, *Out of Empire*, was produced during that year and broadcast the following year as part of the OLI (Keepes et al. 1993:3-6; Perry, C., 1993:3). Other television series were in the process of planning and production.

Local production offered the possibility for closer integration of television and text but this was constrained by the level of funding available and prior commitment to high production values and 'little e' educational television.

The intention to broadcast nationally via the ABC impacted on curriculum decisions other than the obvious ones of broadcast content and delivery mode. In particular, it had a significant impact on the timing of both curriculum delivery and assessment.

5.4.4 Year round curriculum delivery

In addition to favourable ratings and high broadcast quality, the ABC, like all broadcasters, sought a reliable supply and regular scheduling of broadcast material. This alternative agenda played a large part in determining the yearly calendar adopted for the TVOLP and carried over to the OLI. The TVOLP followed the model of North American telecourses which last 13 weeks allowing four sessions a year (Moodie, 1992c). Open learning programs could be broadcast every day of the year (except in leap years) in four study periods in which units were repeated. The programs were scheduled to fixed time slots two, and in some cases, three times each week (OLAA, 1993b).

Adopting this pattern helped satisfy the broadcaster's objectives for regular scheduling and helped secure a supply of television material for the Project as it "immediately made a significant body of high quality educational television readily available" (OLAA, 1993a:3). With program repeats, it also secured a significant volume of programming for the ABC.

In terms of student-oriented curriculum intentions, Moodie (1992c) considered that **year round scheduling** enabled self-paced learning to be initiated. It allowed four entry points (open entry) each year and, during the trial, was accompanied by a flexible assessment policy which allowed students to decide in which examination period they wished to undertake the assessment for a given unit.

Year round scheduling also fostered a number of curriculum outcomes which are perhaps best interpreted as unintended consequences rather than intended curriculum developments. Continuous programming meant that a new study period began before the scheduled examination period for preceding units. Continuing students were thus required to cope with new material at the same time as preparing final assignments and sitting examinations. Year round scheduling also led to an unusual phenomenon, called slippage, which involved varying degrees of disjunction throughout the year between the end of one study period and its corresponding assessment period (Moodie, 1992c).

5.4.5 Assessment slippage

Slippage was the consequence of combining intentions for year round programming with those for assessment. In order to both assure and demonstrate the equivalence of attainment in open learning and conventional education, TVOLP management adopted a policy of common assessment (TVOLP Consortium, 1992:3). For administrative convenience and financial reasons, examinations were run in conjunction with those organised for on-campus and distance students (Moodie, 1992c). Thus, TVOLP students would be assessed using the same test instruments as those used for non-open-learning students studying the same units and, in the case of formal examinations, these would be administered at the same place and time as conventional and distance examinations. However, because on-campus provision employs, at most, three teaching periods per year, this resulted in considerable gaps between the end of some study periods and their examination sessions.

During the television trial the greatest slippage occurred after the fourth study period

(Moodie, 1992c) but, in 1993, the largest disjuncture was some three and a half months which occurred after the third study period[13].

5.4.6 Promoting Commonwealth objectives

The Project exhibited a number of features of value in achieving Commonwealth objectives for higher education and cementing and coordinating Australia's higher education system. In particular, it encouraged **collaboration**, **credit transfer** and **cost-efficiency** (Dawkins, 1987a:35; 1988a:35-38,61).

The Project was, by its very nature, a collaborative effort. The tender was awarded to a consortium comprised of Monash University, the University of New England (UNE) and the University of South Australia (USA). In awarding the project to the consortium, DEET requested that Deakin, Griffith and Wollongong Universities as well as the West Australian DEC (WADEC) be invited to participate (Baldwin, 1991c). Agreement was reached with the first two of these who subsequently joined the consortium. Wollongong went on to develop its interest in open learning through another collaborative venture known as PAGE (Professional And Graduate Education). This offered post-graduate courses in conjunction with SBS television and other universities. Agreement could not be reached with WADEC over use of the ABC rather than its own broadcasting and production facilities and, as a result, WADEC did not join the TVOLP (Lundin, 1993, pers. com.).

Universities participating in the trial were required to grant credit for open learning units, where appropriate, towards their own degrees no matter which university offered the unit. Students of the TVOLP were, thus, guaranteed general credit for their open learning units, but had to compete for a conventional or distance place funded through the Unified National System before they could progress to a degree program. In this way, the trial project demonstrated a mechanism for advancing credit transfer which was employed to even greater effect in the subsequent OLI.

In recognising a common selection of units, the universities of the consortium contributed to cost-efficiency by avoiding wasteful duplication and achieving economies of scale. The funding mechanism supporting the TVOLP is a clear indication that DEET regarded it as a means of furthering its objectives for higher education. That funding came from the National Priority Reserve Fund whose purpose it was to support projects targeting Commonwealth Government objectives for higher education on a competitive basis (Dawkins, 1988a:81; 1988d:46). The initial allocation of $1 million was increased to $2 million once the level of interest in the Project became known (Baldwin, 1991c).

While the TVOLP was delivering its first course of programs early in 1992, and well before the results of the official evaluation were available, plans for an enlarged Open Learning Initiative were already underway (e.g. DEET, 1992b). This is yet another indication that the trial supported government objectives for, as King (1992) noted, it is unlikely this could have occurred had the initiative not accorded with ideas and objectives current within DEET. Originally intended as a two year trial, favourable indicators of the level of student and university interest and the potential for students to be successful[14] in this mode led to the premature termination of the trial and the utilisation of television open higher education in a new venture. Under a new management structure, a degree program was offered on a long term basis[15]. This was intended as an alternative strand of higher education.

5.5 An alternative strand of higher education provision

It seems fairly certain that the genesis of the OLI lay in the forthcoming election, possibly to counter criticism of the government over unmet demand for university places (Johnson, 9.11.1994, pers. com.). Another speculative interpretation of the events is that the Initiative may also have received some impetus from a desire to create a lasting educational monument in the face of likely electoral defeat for the Labor party.

The idea of a national distance education provider, which had given rise to the Commission on Open University in the 1970s, resurfaced in a proposal by the

University of Queensland (Wilson, 1992). This university was subsequently requested by DEET to negotiate a joint proposal with Monash University as manager of the TVOLP. Reaction to Minister Baldwin's announcement that the government was likely to support a new venture with significant, additional funding, forced a general invitation to tender for the proposed services (King, 1992, 1993b; Senate Inquiry, 1994:15).

The tender was won by Monash University which was invited to form a company to develop and manage the provision of nominated services on a commercial basis. The company formed was the Open Learning Agency of Australia Pty Ltd. A feasibility study was also commissioned to report on the establishment of an electronic support network (Baldwin, 1992a:16). This was strongly supported by Minister Baldwin whether or not as part of any project for television curriculum delivery (Johnson, 9.11.1994, pers. com.). The report of the feasibility study became available in 1993 (Deakin University, 1993) and led to the establishment of the Open Learning Electronic Support Service (OLESS) and the Open Net after a further tender process.

A central intention of the OLI was to guarantee students access to study with clear pathways to degrees. An alternative route to university qualifications was thus created, not through the establishment of a new degree granting authority and not by opening distance study through the DEC system, but rather through a brokering agency operating on a commercial basis. Established universities supplied learning materials to students registering with the broker and rewarded open learning credit with their own degrees. The stated intention was to:

- increase flexibility and innovation in the provision of high quality tertiary education services (DEET, 1992a:1).

5.5.1 Degree access

Through the OLI, it became possible to undertake degrees, largely, or entirely, through Open Learning. This represented a complete reversal of the view of the Martin Report (1964:10) that distance education was not a university function.

Participating universities were invited to offer 'Open Learning degrees' at least two thirds of which could be completed in this mode. Providers could instigate a residency requirement that a third of the units for the degree be their own and this might include on and off-campus study. Apart from this, the remaining credit could be units from any provider (Open Learning Agency of Australia Interim Academic Programs Board [OLAA IAPB], 1993, minute no. 6:2).

As owner and financial backer of the Initiative, and in order to meet its contractual obligations for **degree access** through open learning, Monash University introduced two new degrees to be available from March, 1993 (Monash University, 1993:1). One was a broad generalist degree, the Bachelor of General Studies, requiring first and second but not third year units in a specified, broad range of disciplines. The other was a Bachelor of Business Studies which aimed initially to satisfy the registration requirements of the Australian Society of Certified Practising Accountants and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia (OLAA, 1993c:4).

The new mission of television open learning to provide pathways to degrees was reflected in a change in its promotion from a trial and taste of university study, as it was in the days of the TVOLP, to enticement to take a university degree via Open Learning. In conjunction with this new emphasis on degree access, the option of studying without undertaking the assessment was closed. Reinstatement of this option has since been agreed in principle (Open Learning Agency of Australia Academic Programs Board [OLAA APB], 1993a:7 minute no. 49).

The changed program attracted a significantly different student population consistent with the new program and advertising. Whereas the trial had attracted a predominance of older students studying for pleasure and had absorbed few students who had tried unsuccessfully for a university place elsewhere (13% of its intake) (Keepes et al., 1993:4.3), the OLI attracted a younger target market and one more interested in vocationally oriented subjects (Keepes, 1993). This was no accident but consistent with the intentions of the program.

5.5.2 Intended student population: Meeting unmet demand

The Review of Efficiency and Effectiveness, as Campion and Kelly (1988) observed, had appeared to suggest a trade-off in which metropolitan universities would take more school leavers while adult enrolments in the distance mode with regional providers would ensure the latter's continued viability.

An intention to stimulate a similar **substitution effect** drove the Initiative and, in this respect, the OLI deviated markedly from its predecessor which aimed to extend access to those who could not attend on-campus. In an outline of the trial project circulated by the Higher Education Division of DEET, the link between television open learning and mature-age participation was made. The outline reads:

> The primary focus of the recently announced project is access. The priority accorded school leavers for university places during the 1980s has prevented a major expansion of mature-age participation. Demographic changes and the increased education and training needs of the workforce associated with award restructuring, will bring more focus to bear on mature-age participation. In this context it is important to ensure that groups unable to attend on-campus classes are not further disadvantaged (Milligan, 1991 cited in Moodie, 1991:4).

DEET's intention to create more space in city institutions for school leavers by shunting mature-age candidates to Open Learning later became explicit although not public. While the government has denied that the OLI was prompted by concern for unmet demand (Matchett, 1992), this intention is documented in the minutes of a TVOLP Consortium meeting addressed by a senior DEET executive about the expansion of the TVOLP into the wider Open Learning Initiative. The minutes record that:

> the immediate aim of an Open Learning Initiative is to **address unmet demand**, especially by the 'substitution effect' of providing new opportunities for mature-age candidates who constitute one third of the demand for conventional university places (TVOLP Consortium, 1992:2) [researcher's emphasis].

At the same time, university quotas for mature-age students were being reduced (Murphy, 1992) through negotiation with DEET on institutional profiles and funding. A policy of giving school leavers priority for places generated by growth in higher education had already been in place for several years (NBEET, 1990a:9) and mature-age participation had fallen from 55.7% in 1984 to 45.4% in 1990 (Higher Education Council, 1992a:3).

Concurrently and in the context of political concern for high youth unemployment, a trial **Year 13 program** was being organised to assist school leavers unable to move into university places (Monash University, circa 1993a). Government interest in the OLI as a means of addressing unmet demand thus extended to school leavers.

5.5.3 Tutorial support for school leavers: Year 13.

In this scheme, which was also funded through the National Priority Reserve Fund, eligible schools and TAFE colleges were funded by the Commonwealth government to provide support such as study skills, tutorials, computer facilities and library assistance for school leavers and mature learners studying units through OLA (Monash University, circa 1993b). Schools eligible for funding support were state schools, some systemic Catholic schools and TAFE colleges who provided support for students free of charge. Private schools could also participate in the program but, because they received no funding, needed to charge for the services provided (Monash University, circa 1993c).

In the first study period of 1993, Monash University and the University of South Australia assisted schools and colleges run Year 13 programs[16]. The universities offered the schools support and advice, as well as briefing sessions, staff development, quality control and evaluation (Monash University, circa 1993d). The attractiveness of this option to students was boosted with a minimum guarantee that 100 places in the second year of Monash University's Bachelor of Arts would be reserved in 1994 for

students attaining a good credit average in two full semesters of Year 13 studies (Monash University, circa 1993b, circa 1993c).

Providing tutorial assistance for recent high school graduates and others in this way acknowledges, in some ways, the inadequacy of the Initiative in not doing so for all its students. It seems to indicate that policy makers expected Open Learning, as constituted, to be best suited to mature learners. Research has shown that these students are generally more able to fend for themselves with minimal support (e.g. Jevons, 1984).

Cost efficiency was a central intention in the Initiative and a major reason why tutorials were not included for all students as part of the standard charge. Intentions of cost efficiency underpin the funding arrangements and cost structures of the Initiative.

5.5.4 Cost containment: Impact on curriculum

In seeking to achieve cost efficiencies for higher education in the restructuring of 1988, the Commonwealth proposed increasing participation rates while at the same time pegging funding to 1% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Dawkins, 1988c:1). This rate of funding already represented a reduced rate of spending on higher education from a high of 1.36% in 1975 (Dawkins, 1987a, Table F.1). Further efficiencies were intended, for example, through discipline reviews intended to reduce duplication, through reduction in the number of external providers in order to achieve economies of scale and improve quality (SCEET, 1988:10,31) and through a proposal, later aborted (Baldwin, 1992a:15), to fund external student load at a lower rate (75%) than internal load (Dawkins, 1988a:51; Dawkins, 1988d:16).

The **funding reductions** intended through the OLI were far more radical than the 25% reduction planned but not achieved for external load. They were more radical even than the savings envisaged by the University of Queensland for its proposal for a national distance provider. This proposed new university (University of Australia), much like the Hong Kong Open Learning Institute (HKOLI), would confer its own degrees for external courses secured by contracting existing courses (Wilson, 1992). Tentative funding estimates in the proposal specified government funding at around 25% of the standard operating grant in addition to a student contribution, so that, overall, the proposed university was costed at around 40% of conventional higher education.

The radical nature of the Initiative was that its recurrent costs were to be funded entirely from student revenue. In this respect it was similar to the HKOLI (e.g. Johnson, 1990b:75). The Commonwealth contributed to the establishment of the Initiative with an allocation of $28.4 million for course development, promotion, research and evaluation (DEET, 1992a:4.1). While this was a significant amount, it represented a one-off expenditure for the Commonwealth with no ongoing recurrent funding obligations and no commitment beyond the initial three year establishment period (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993, Schedule 2:7).

Had the Initiative been implemented as a new university with degree granting status, massive funding commitments for the federal government would have been implied, for in that case, the new university would have been entitled to recurrent funding as part of the Unified National System. Another barrier to this course of action was that, in the Australian system, university establishment is a state government function rather than a Commonwealth responsibility. On the other hand, the Commonwealth could have opened access to higher education by expanding external load in the DEC system. However, similar funding obligations would have been incurred.

Establishing Open Learning through a brokering system using existing courses from established universities appears to have been a deliberate strategy on the part of the Commonwealth[17] aimed primarily at achieving its intentions of increased access, cost containment and cost efficiency. Its purpose was to ensure that, in the way the Initiative was funded, there would be no recurrent funding obligations for the Commonwealth. The Initiative also contributed to university coordination and rationalisation of distance provision.

Establishing Open Learning as a user-pays option for higher education required some semantic manoeuvring to avoid the requirement set by the Whitlam Labor government in 1972 and reinforced by the Higher Education Funding Act of 1988 that undergraduate university students not be charged fees[18]. Open Learning students were clients of a broker. Neither they nor non-award students were considered to be enrolled in an award course at the time they were studying. They could, therefore, be charged fees and were exempt from HECS but they were not counted as part of universities' load for funding purposes (Moodie, 1993a, 1993b). After accumulating sufficient credit, such students could apply to be conferred with a degree.

In the initial study period, students were to be charged $300 per unit which was approximately equivalent to the HECS fee for undergraduate study. This charge was pegged to rise no faster than the Consumer Price Index (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993, Schedule 1:6)[19]. At that time, conventional student load received government funding of around $900 per unit in addition to revenue from HECS. OLA was expected to run on the equivalent of HECS, or one quarter of the funding available to conventional university courses, provided entirely from student revenue. Thus, cost savings of around 75% were intended, indeed demanded, of the Initiative in comparison with the funding of conventional student load[20].

Not even the most optimistic of Australian studies (e.g. Harman, 1991; Hudson Report, 1986; Interex Ltd, 1989 cited in Moodie, 24.5.1993 pers. com.; Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on External Studies [SCES], 1987 cited in Johnson, in press) had suggested that savings in the order of those intended for the OLI could be attained without jeopardising quality. The Review of Efficiency and Effectiveness in Higher Education was of the opinion that:

> there is no evidence that new technologies for transmitting information and acquiring knowledge are likely, in the foreseeable future, to make a significant contribution to reducing the costs of delivering courses while maintaining the level of teaching effectiveness (Hudson Report, 1986:152).

The Review concluded:

> On...the use of new technologies, the committee is satisfied that there is no scope for major economies in institutional operations (Hudson Report, 1986:155).

Harman's (1991) empirical study of the relative costs of internal and external provision had supported this view and failed to confirm predictions of cost savings for Australian distance education made in the Interex Report[21]. Nevertheless, the UKOU and the OLA (BC) were known to operate at a cost per student of half or less that of conventional universities in their own countries. Cost efficiencies were achieved through the use of technology and large enrolments (Johnson, 9.11.1994, pers. com.).

In the OLI, savings were planned by "relying... on the purchase of existing accredited courses" (DEET, 1992a:3.1) and "building on the long experience, depth of expertise and extensive range of course offerings and infrastructure of distance education" (DEET, 1992a:2.3). OLA is essentially a broker of existing courses and, to a large extent, this obviates the need for regular expenditure for course development, capital infrastructure and permanent staffing. In effect, cost efficiencies were to be achieved by tapping under-utilised capacity or generating productivity increases in universities and by capitalising on economies of scale at the marginal rate of provision without the expense of fixed costs. With respect to the television component, savings were to be achieved by cashing in on the low resale value of decontextualised, overseas educational television product. Further efficiencies were planned by redefining what a student could expect to receive for the basic charge and charging for optional services.

Thus, the funding frame determined intentions regarding the use of existing television product, use of existing course materials and adoption of a user-pays approach. Extensive reliance on Australian television production had been well beyond the resources of the TVOLP and remained so in the Initiative. Unit adaptation rather than new unit development was emphasised[22]. To be a viable proposition from a provider's point of view, reliance on existing courses [23] or alternative motivation and funding of new courseware was necessary.

Thus, even though studies suggested only modest potential cost efficiencies were possible for distance education, OLA was intended to run on significantly reduced funding levels. These funding intentions affected many aspects of the intended curriculum. In accordance with its commercial configuration and need to be financially viable, a business orientation underlies the Initiative's entire operation. Units were to be offered in areas of high demand (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993, Schedule 1:2) and services beyond those specified as basic were subject to additional charges.

5.5.5 User-pays support services

King (1992) foresaw costing frames determining student support. In reality, the level of service intended to support students was specified at levels which were arguably lower than those generally available to conventional and distance education students. In return for the basic charge, Open Learning students were to receive "all the materials, services and experiences necessary to complete all the requirements of each unit" (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993, Schedule 1:3). This was not necessarily all that might be desirable.

Services regarded as essential were: registration and advisory services, information on study skills, a handbook and course materials, assessment, library services, postage and certification (Australian Government Solicitor, Schedule 1:4). Non-essential, however, were the right of access to academic staff[24] and tutorial sessions. These were offered as optional extras attracting additional charges at the discretion of individual providers. This is a rather strange conception of essential services in higher education. However, it is indicative of a widespread political intention to spread the costs of higher education among its users and beneficiaries and, in so doing, transfer at least part of the financial responsibility to the private economy.

5.5.6 The economic rationalist agenda: Balancing industry potential and rampant commercialism

Provision of optional support services at the learner's expense was an extension of the user-pays principle which Cullen (1992:5) and Williams, Long, Carpenter and Hayden (1993:4) considered essential for continued growth in higher education during the budgetary constraint of the late eighties and early nineties. This principle reflected the Commonwealth government's economic rationalist perspective towards education as an industry and this, according to Scott (1987:57), followed a world-wide trend. The notion of education as an industry extended beyond the user-pays principle to viewing it as an exploitable, revenue generating resource. It was anticipated that the OLI would strengthen Australia's capacity to deliver courses overseas and develop the export potential of Australia's higher education industry (Baldwin, 1992c). In the decade prior to this, there had been increasing concern by the federal government to establish Australia firmly in the Pacific Rim context.

Services stipulated as essential defined the minimum students had a right to expect for the basic fee. However, in practice, services offered to students for the basic charge, apart from those classified as essential, were a matter of individual provider intention and policy and could vary across units and from department to department within a university.

Some universities adopted a hard-nosed, business orientation to the provision of services and this extended to viewing open learning as a marketing device for their higher priced, more thoroughly serviced courses (Cree, 22.9.93, pers. com.). The attitude was that the Open Learning version of their units was the cheap and nasty product line designed to contrast with high profit lines. As the saying goes, students would get what they paid for. Tutorial access was offered at up to $66 an hour (OLAA, 1993d). For this fee, students were generally entitled to four, fifteen minute tutorial sessions which were non-transferable if not used. The cost of tutorials was also non-refundable. Other providers were less profit oriented and either did not charge for academic access or charged a small fee for unlimited access, demonstrating a commitment to supporting student learning as far as possible and treating their Open Learning students in much the same manner as their other external ones.

As a consequence of individual provider policy, services to students were not common across units and different servicing, pricing and charging policies applied. Information on the various universities' services and charges was, however, not provided in the student handbook.

Such a system in which providers decided to a certain extent the services and charges they would offer, would seem to have the potential for competitive market forces to drive prices and quality to the most efficient levels. However, because consumers had no choice between providers for specified units and because they were also uninformed about the details of service provision, the situation was far from a competitive, free market system which requires numerous, independent buyers and sellers and perfect market information.

In this sellers' market, there was a potential for profiteering by university providers. On the one hand, the Commonwealth was concerned to contain expenditure and fund access through the OLI from non-government sources. On the other hand, it was constrained by its intention of fee parity, by the Labor Party's reluctance to re-introduce university fees and by a concern to contain costs to students. These concerns led to the specification of minimum requirements for essential services to be provided for the basic fee. The low levels of funding, in fact, encouraged universities to charge for services they were accustomed to consider part of their normal responsibilities to students. Again, the pressure towards privatising previously public sector responsibilities is clear.

5.5.7 Credit transfer

For reasons of cost containment, the OLI, unlike the Open Learning Agency of British Columbia (NBEET, 1992:32), did not function as a credit bank and lacked the power to grant degrees on its own behalf. Success in providing degree pathways was, thus, entirely dependent upon universities recognising credit for OLA units in their own degrees. This meant that **credit transfer** was a vital intention in the Initiative and this was supported by internal policy.

The Commonwealth fostered recognition of Open Learning study in a number of ways. To retain full membership status on the Academic Programs Board, participating universities were required to offer degrees at least two thirds of which could be satisfied through Open Learning (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993:7). The Commonwealth also offered an incentive to facilitate transfer of Open Learners to on-campus courses in the form of a 20% funding premium on the load generated by those students (Baldwin, 1992a:16). Through these means, universities were both pressured and encouraged to open degree pathways to Open Learning students. At the same time, these measures advanced system wide objectives of opening degree access and improving credit transfer.

To encourage and monitor credit transfer during the TVOLP, universities were asked what credit they would be prepared to grant for Open Learning study. The responses were disappointing (Gilmore and Moodie, 1992). Despite acceptance of credit transfer principles as a condition of membership of the Unified National System of Higher Education (Dawkins, 1988a:36), degree options remained dependent on the credit recognition policies of individual universities.

The obligation for credit transfer even acted as a barrier to participation because some providers were not prepared to grant blanket credit for units over which they had little control and responsibility and, instead, insisted on their right to determine matters of cross-accreditation on a case by case basis (Lundin, 1994, pers. com.).

The Initiative also contained an intention of increasing credit articulation between educational sectors - another Commonwealth objective (Dawkins, 1988a:61-70). This intention was facilitated through the contract specification that 15 TAFE courses would be provided by 1995 (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993, Schedule 1:2). Articulation with TAFE was advanced through the Bachelor of General Studies from Monash which granted credit to a set limit for a wide range of learning experiences including TAFE units, on-campus studies, distance education, Open Learning, year 13, professional experience and evidence of overcoming disadvantage (Monash University, 1993).

Open learning degrees were being set up as new and distinctive degrees. Their credibility was untried and untested. Securing acceptance of this new form of study, both for its degrees and for its units as credit towards conventional degrees, was therefore an intention of high priority for program implementors.

5.5.8 Parity of esteem

Because of the need to gain acceptance, achieving parity of esteem[25] became a powerful organising principle driving decisions on curriculum content, assessment practices and exam scheduling. Parity was thought to be linked to quality and to student retention (TVOLP Consortium, 1992:3). It was considered a linchpin for achieving higher order curriculum objectives such as establishing a new strand of higher education and expanding credit transfer.

The main strategy employed in pursuit of parity was one of demonstrating **sameness**[26]. It was argued that if Open Learning students undertook the same assessment tasks, sat the same examinations, at the same times, under the same conditions and were graded by the same staff as other conventional and distance students, then there would be a greater prospect of their being regarded as of equivalent standard and quality (Moodie, 1992c). Sameness was seen as crucial for the prospect of achieving credibility and credit transfer for Open Learning and underpinned many of the details of the intended curriculum such as assessment practices and timing.

In the TVOLP, assessment methods had been determined by unit providers. In the interests of parity and credit recognition in the Initiative, assessment practices were standardised to an assessment load of 4,500 words in two assignments and an item of externally invigilated assessment (OLAA, 1993a). In effect, flexibility in assessment practices was to be sacrificed in pursuit of parity and credit recognition. In practice, however, considerable variation in assessment procedures remained (Atkinson, Conboy, Dodds, McInnis and Atkinson, 1995:45).

In the TVOLP, course size, content, difficulty level and credit weightings had been designed to be comparable with accepted semester-long courses and this was easily achieved by using regular, 'off-the-shelf', Australian distance education courses. Consideration of unit quality focussed largely on demonstrating sameness in order to win parity and credit recognition. In the Initiative also, courses were essentially courses also available by distance education. Even so, it was important that the process of demonstrating academic quality, or parity, be a visible one. Units admitted before the introduction of a tender process and not evaluated as part of the TVOLP were to be referred to a review process and the question of parity was incorporated into the tender selection process (OLAA APB, 1993a:6 minute no. 36).

One difficulty with a policy of sameness is that equal treatment does not necessarily guarantee equitable outcomes. According to the Faure (1972:73), opening educational opportunities does not mean "the same treatment for everyone" but rather "making sure everyone receives a suitable education at a pace and through methods adapted to his particular person". It is possible, therefore, that a policy of sameness might actually put Open Learning students at a disadvantage.

5.5.9 Quality and performance standards

The Agreement between the Open Learning Agency and the Commonwealth set certain quality and performance standards. It reflected the concern for quality in the sense of demonstrating the **academic parity** of Open Learning courses with those available through the Unified National System (e.g. Australian Government Solicitor, 1993, Schedule 1:3). It also exhibited concern for quality in the sense of **service to students**. The contract specified the **kinds** of service intended as basic support for students and set performance standards for unit provision. The latter was reinforced with the requirement that "all contracts after March 1993, between the Company and providers must stipulate services standards" (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993, Schedule 1:5). Notably however, the contract set few quantitative standards for the services provided centrally by the broker and simply required it to "arrange for the delivery of open learning services" (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993, Schedule:2).

This appears to make quality a legal responsibility of unit providers. It was accompanied, in implementing intentions on quality, by a reticence to impose similar standards for the services provided centrally by OLA[27]. For example, the Academic Programs Board of the Open Learning Agency of Australia (OLAA APB) adopted an agreement on quality (OLAA, 1993e) which specified performance targets and review processes for unit provision (OLAA APB, 1993a:6 minute no. 35). It was also considering a proposal for formal endorsement of teachers and providers of student support services (OLAA APB, 1993b:6 minute no. 36). However, specific targets and review mechanisms proposed for provider and central office services (OLAA Secretariat, 1993) proceeded no further than receiving the Board's consideration (OLAA APB, 1993a:5 minute no. 28). Apparently, the initial approach to quality problems was to narrow the focus of potential causative agents to university providers since there was little movement on standards for central services or mechanisms to monitor quality in this area[28].

The standards for unit provision included materials delivery within two weeks of registration, assessment feedback within three weeks and response times to queries of one day for phone enquiries and ten days for considered advice by letter (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993:5). Such quality specifications were a first for Australian distance provision. Yet even though they were set at levels less demanding than those regarded normal elsewhere, for example, New Zealand (Johnson, 9.11.1994, pers. com.), they proved difficult to meet (see page 234).

Little attention appears to have been given to whether the achievement of quality might not be compatible with the level of funding allocated, the time frames intended or the economic rationalist approach adopted. Quality issues appear to have been given little formal consideration beyond the prescription of basic kinds of service and minimum performance standards for providers in certain service areas[29]. One concerned voice was that of King whose remarks bear repeating:

> Despite the work ... done on this issue, I am still bothered that the OLI promises to deliver at a very small fee what is currently provided at full EFTSU funding. Despite opportunities for economies of scale, it appears likely that some services will have to be cut and it would be most serious if

> these were the student support mechanisms which anecdotal evidence strongly suggests are linked to student retention in programs (King, 1992:15).

King (1992) is arguably incorrect in his statement that the OLI promised to deliver the same service as conventional universities for its services centre on the delivery of prepared learning materials and do not necessarily include course development, tuition or research. Even so, there remains a concern that an adequate level of student support can be provided at the levels of funding specified.

Papers on quality prepared for the Academic Programs Board (Bradley, 1993; OLAA, 1993e; OLAA Secretariat, 1993) revealed the fledgling status and general dearth of quality assurance policies, procedures and information collecting systems in the infant Initiative. Bradley's (1993) paper highlighted the need to develop principles to direct unit selection and curriculum expansion. This supports the contention, to be elaborated in a subsequent section, that curriculum development was administratively, rather than academically, driven in the early stages.

In essence, the task of the OLI was to expand and mould the collection of university units inherited from the TVOLP into a coherent program with degree pathways and to do this within a very short time frame[30].

The predominant intentions of the TVOLP trial had been set by the Commonwealth in terms of access to university study, trialing television delivery and stimulating new sources of student enrolment. As the TVOLP had been intended to provide a taste of university study, the curriculum did not need to be carefully designed. Any of a wide range of units from various disciplines thought to be in demand or to have general interest value would have done equally well. In sharp contrast to this, the expanded Initiative was intended to provide access to degrees. Closer attention to its curriculum was needed.

5.5.10 Disciplinary spread and modes of delivery

The Agreement with the Commonwealth specified the size of the intended curriculum as 15 units for March 1993, 75 units for the remainder of 1993 and a doubling of that number by 1995 (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993, Schedule 1:2). This seems a very **rapid rate of expansion** given that implementation and future planning had to occur concurrently. The Academic Programs Board recognised a tension between the need to offer a wide range of units and the need to restrict the size of the curriculum to maximise economies of scale and ensure each unit's viability[31] (OLAA APB, 1993c:2 minute no. 9).

Nineteen units were, in fact, offered in the inaugural study period of 1993. This included all seven of the original units offered in the TVOLP, additional first level units and limited studies at second level (OLAA, 1993b, 1993c).

The necessary expansion and development of curriculum that this change required had to be achieved, not with the authority of a degree granting institution with the staff, resources and time to plan and produce a detailed curriculum to suit its clients needs, but rather from the position of a broker under certain constraints. OLA was constrained by the responses it received to invitations to tender, constrained by the willingness of providers to offer degrees based on OLA units, and also largely constrained to use pre-existing course material for which appropriate television accompaniment at first year level was available.

With a greatly expanded curriculum, it was not possible, in terms of either programming time or cost, to provide a television component for all units and this was never intended. In general, television concentrated on first level units. As well as reliance on print as a mainstay of curriculum delivery, OLA sought to encourage alternative modes of delivery such as computer-managed learning, radio, audio and video (OLAA, 1993f:3). In the first study period of 1993, one unit, *International Politics*, was radio-based while a number of units, particularly language units, were supported by audio tapes (OLAA, 1993b).

188

5.5.11 Administratively driven curriculum development

In retrospect, curriculum formation before the establishment of the unit tender process, was a fortuitous affair, the "result of serendipity, politics and pragmatism" (OLAA, 1993a:2). In essence, units were selected on the basis of:

> the interest of academics and the availability of materials at very short notice, but additional influences were judgements about the popularity of units, their acceptability by other universities for credit transfer, relationship to existing units and the development of sequences of study, and jockeying for advantage by Open Learning providers (OLAA, 1993a:2).

Selection of the seven units offered during the TVOLP had been a fairly pragmatic process with unit choice determined by the availability of suitable television content and the interests of provider institutions and academics in the consortium. For example, *Australian Studies* had come on-stream because the Commonwealth had been keen to include a non-DEC and this was the only unit which Griffith University, the non-DEC consortium member, was offering (OLAA, 1993a). The process of curriculum development remained fairly fortuitous during the phase of interim management, from October, 1992 until March, 1993, although consideration was also given to study sequences that might lead to degrees and prospects for accreditation.

Monash's commitment to the venture in offering two Open Learning degrees and pathways for transfer to on-campus degrees set the example for other providers. The new degree pathways provided by the parent institution fulfilled OLA's contractual obligation and allowed the aims of the Initiative to be met, at least minimally, for the opening study period. While these degrees were certainly entrepreneurial, the curriculum remained quite limited in the inaugural stages as did detailed planning for its eventual form.

From this limited base, viable, credible, alternative degree pathways had to be built on the basis of responses to tender. Expansion was dependent upon tender submissions and subsequent negotiations as well as the policies of degree-granting institutions in developing Open Learning degrees. The need to meet administrative requirements and to simply get the job done in time, meant the curriculum was **administratively driven** in the early stages. This resulted in an academic curriculum with "gaps and overlaps which would restrict decisions" (OLAA IPC, 1992a:3 minute no. 14).

The Academic Programs Board registered dissatisfaction that curriculum selection was being governed by the tender process with little input from the Board (OLAA APB, 1993c:3 minute no. 14). At this early stage, mechanisms, in the form of curriculum advisory panels, still needed to be put in place to ensure that educational principles and intentions shaped the developing curriculum rather than predominantly commercial and administrative considerations (OLAA APB, 1993c:4 minute nos. 16-17; 1993c:3-5 minute nos. 14-23).

In order to facilitate the development of degree options, certain features of tenders were accorded advanced standing. Those features were cooperative submission by a number of universities, cross-crediting of Open Learning units in providers' degrees, proposals for curriculum sequences as opposed to single units, and multidisciplinarity of units (OLAA, 1993f). Multidisciplinary units were also favoured for first level in order to minimise duplication and progress efficiently from the units available towards a diversity of disciplinary specialisms at higher levels (OLAA IAPB, 1993:3, minute no. 15,17). Units at second or third level could build on first level units and be either multi or mono-disciplinary. Multi-disciplinary units also offered value for money from local television productions (OLAA, 1993f).

An overarching consideration in curriculum planning was the viability of the company. For this reason, as previously noted, units were to concentrate in areas of high demand (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993, Schedule 1:2). The nature of unserviced demand across disciplinary fields was canvassed using distance education enrolment statistics as indicators (OLAA APB, 1993c:7 minute no. 33). A policy that units not be offered for less than 100 registrations was introduced. (OLAA IPC, 1992a:2 minute no. 12d). Economic considerations also led to the restriction of text book outlets to a single mail-order supplier. Commercial text suppliers were unwilling to bear the risks of over and under-ordering (i.e. unsold stock and the cost of airfreighting extra supplies) without the status of preferred supplier. Thus, limiting outlets was necessary to ensure timely supply (OLAA, 1993a:11).

5.5.12 Submissions driven curriculum development

While the planning committee concerned itself with the disciplinary spread of its offerings (OLAA IPC, 1992a:3 minute no. 17, 1992b:5 minute no. 27) and with sequences of study leading to degrees (OLAA IPC, 1992b:2-3 minute no. 12), the specific content of the curriculum within a disciplinary field, such as marketing, remained **driven by submissions** and dependent on the outcome of the tender process (e.g. OLAA APB, 1993b:3 minute no. 12c). OLA could invite proposals in required subject areas. Unit selection could give consideration to many curriculum issues such as the content and quality of the materials, services to support students and the provider's capacity to service students nationally. Negotiations could seek to change proposals in desirable directions. However, the specific content and nature of the curriculum remained largely the province of unit providers through their proposals.

5.5.13 Social justice intentions

In the public forum, rhetoric about the aims of television open learning emphasised access and, initially at least, included an intention to improve access for the disadvantaged. Groups disadvantaged in terms of higher educational participation had been identified in *A Fair Chance for All* (DEET, 1990a:10; 1990c:2)[32]. The Commonwealth had set equity of participation as an objective for higher education and considered distance education an important means of achieving this (Dawkins, 1988a:49). In announcing the TVOLP, Baldwin (1991c:2) indicated the project would improve access for the disabled, for people living in rural and isolated areas and those who could not attend on-campus.

Although open as to entry[33], flexible as to location, and sensitive to the need for gender and racially inclusive curricula (e.g. OLAA, 1993g), the policies and practices adopted for Open Learning made little systematic provision for redressing inequities associated with race, gender, class or ethnic background. Moodie (1992c) reached a similar conclusion with respect to the TVOLP and no additional, special provision for the disadvantaged was incorporated into its successor.

In a general way, Open Learning provides university access through its distance methodology and national reach to those unable to attend for any reason - whether that be work or family commitments, geographical isolation or disability. It also provides access for those with scholastic records inadequate for admission to conventional courses. However, the only proactive policy implemented on social justice amounted to providing, with all broadcasts except those in language units, a teletext caption option for hearing impaired students (Perlgut, 1993). Monash University also offered to grant credit towards its Bachelor of General Studies for achievement in overcoming disadvantage (Monash University, 1993:9).

As a final lens on the curriculum intended for the Initiative, the remaining section examines universities' reasons for participating in the program. These motivations fell at the margin of curriculum intentions for students and, for this reason, were not comprehensively studied. In-depth study was also prohibited by the large number of providers in the expanded project. Nevertheless, the following picture of universities' various reasons for participating gives an indication of the competing agendas which shaped the curriculum.

5.6 Competing agendas of providers

For the ABC, the Open Learning broadcaster, coalitions with outside interests and sources of funding for production were attractive, in the aftermath of budget reductions, as a means of maintaining production activity (Ramsay, 1988). The Initiative also accorded with their overall objectives for educational television.

For some university providers, revenue was also reportedly a motivator as explained below. Although far from lucrative, when fixed costs were omitted from the calculations and costings were based solely on marginal costs, it was possible to break even financially (Kemmis, 8.6.94, pers. com.) or make a small profit. By participating in the OLI, some overstaffed university departments intended to generate revenue and protect staffing levels by utilising spare capacity[34]. In so doing, they have unwittingly demonstrated that the Commonwealth's intention of forcing more cost efficient curriculum delivery by this means was indeed attainable. In the long run, this is likely to bring further pressures to bear for greater efficiencies in all modes of higher education.

The profit motive was fuelled or inhibited by internal funding arrangements within the provider university and this included arrangements for apportionment of the income from OLA registrants. Where the latter was directed primarily to the school, where costs remained covered by central budgets and where fees were charged for academic access, the incentive was reportedly high (Joy, 26.5.93, pers. com.). It was also explained that departments might have greater discretionary funds with OLA units because funding was proportional to student numbers and was more likely to be passed to the staff concerned with service delivery. This meant that additional staff could be employed as needed (Gollan, 24.5.93, pers. com.; Joy, 26.5.93, pers. com.).

In stark contrast to this revenue generating rationale for participating, other academics and administrators strongly denied that there was any profit to be made from delivering OLA units and, in fact, argued the reverse. They insisted that internal funding was subsidising OLA units to a large extent, for example, with accommodation, computing services and so on so that overall, the universities made a loss on this activity (Chick, 4.5.92, pers. com.; Cree, 1993:36; Kemmis, 8.6.94, pers. com.; Senate Inquiry, 1994:23).

In some cases, academics had the promotion of their discipline in mind and sought to advertise its worth in the public eye and stimulate future enrolments[35]. Alternatively, they were interested in stimulating debate on social issues (e.g. Arnold, 26.5.93, pers. com.). There were also concerns for equity, particularly that mature-age students were not being adequately served through conventional means (Quartly, 26.5.93, pers. com.). Open Learning offered a means of increasing these students' opportunities for university access.

Course development (Moodie, 1992b) and course quality enhancement were additional reasons for participation. The course development funding available through the Initiative, as well as the challenge and experience of offering courses in this mode, was seen as a means of enhancing curriculum quality for both on and off-campus students (e.g. Cowie, 22.9.93, pers. com.).

While some providers were keen to take on open provision, others had become involved in response to a specific request to provide units for the TVOLP[36]. Others again were acting strategically, intending to expand into distance education (Whitlock, 12.7.93, pers. com.) or acting in accordance with the rationale that, by getting in on the ground floor, they would benefit from the promotion surrounding the project and the opportunity to influence developing policy (e.g. King, 1992). It was reportedly even worth taking a loss on course provision through Open Learning in return for the national visibility the institution expected to gain. It was also argued that, in order to keep future options on participation open, it would be better to participate in the initial stages and decide about continuing at a later date (Kemmis, 8.6.94, pers. com.; Reid, J., 18.6.93, pers. com.).

In summary, universities' intentions covered a wide ambit from self-interest, self-preservation and strategic advantage to concern for the public good, the Open Learning curriculum and the quality of their teaching.

5.7 Summary and conclusions

In this chapter, the intentions informing curriculum development in the Australian Open Learning Initiative have been detailed. The new topographical features of the higher educational environment provided by the Initiative were largely attributable to the vision and direction of the Commonwealth government which directed formation of the curriculum through its funding control and tender specifications. Intentions at federal government level set the frames for modes of provision, management structure, funding levels, cost structures, student services and discipline offerings. These strongly influenced subsequent curriculum developments and options for students.

The fine detail of the intended curriculum such as the units on offer, timing and assessment practices were largely the responsibility of the Initiative's implementors, most particularly the Open Learning Agency of Australia and its university and broadcaster 'partners'. At the same time however, DEET, at least initially, was also known to have played a constructive and significant role in these decisions (Moodie, 1992b).

To a great extent, curriculum planning for Open Learning targeted system wide objectives for higher education. Multiple agendas shaped curriculum development and students were not always the central focus of concern. Nevertheless, curriculum decisions could, generally, be rationalised in terms of the curriculum intended for students. Unfortunately, while public rhetoric about Open Learning emphasised outcomes for students, these aims were often constrained, even compromised, by less publicly acknowledged objectives.

This chapter has provided evidence that, although Open Learning stemmed from a federal government intention to stimulate technological innovation in distance education and to promote specialisation, cohesion and expertise in the national system of Distance Education Centres, early favourable responses by student and university participants led the Commonwealth to proceed with an intention to develop television Open Learning as an alternative strand of higher education.

For students, the Initiative was intended to provide degree access, or at least the opportunity to try a limited higher education curriculum, employing a teaching rationale arguably most suited to the independent, mature learner. Open entry and distance methods guaranteed all students a place regardless of their location or educational background for a charge equivalent to that of conventional undergraduate education. For this charge, it was intended to provide students with essential self-instructional materials and the option of additional support at the learners' expense.

In establishing Open Learning, DEET specified curriculum structures designed to promote the credibility and acceptance of the new mode so that parity of esteem became a central intention informing further curriculum development. Credit transfer was vital to the intention of providing degree pathways through Open Learning, as the Initiative had no degree granting authority of its own and Open Learning degrees could include units of study from universities other than that offering the degree. Both inducements and coercion were employed to further credit transfer and acceptance of Open Learning.

The use of television was expected to attract and inform learners about this option as well as serve educational and entertainment objectives for Open Learning students and the viewing public. It thus served to facilitate access, marketing and project viability as well as attain educational objectives.

In contrast to these more student-oriented curriculum intentions, the political attractiveness of the Initiative lay in its potential as a highly visible, yet low cost option for providing access and addressing unmet demand for university places; in its potential as a revenue earning export industry; and as an instrument of reform in promoting the Unified National System of Higher Education. This potential as an instrument of reform lay, not only in its cost effectiveness and suitability as a mass delivery system, but also in its promotion of a centrally coordinated, nationally available curriculum, and its promotion of credit transfer.

Through the OLI, the Commonwealth intended to establish alternative means of satisfying unmet demand for university places through a substitution effect of diverting mature-age candidates away from metropolitan universities and freeing places therein for school leavers.

The economic rationalist agenda was strongly evident in the Initiative, influencing its cost structures and curriculum provision. The Initiative was intended to operate on substantially reduced funding levels at no recurrent cost to the government. In this way, the additional load carried by Open Learning would essentially be funded from the private economy but according to conditions and limitations set by the Commonwealth. The cost levels of the Initiative predictably played a major role as frames for subsequent curriculum decisions.

In its role in educational provision, OLA is similar to the Open Learning Agency of British Columbia and the Hong Kong Open Learning Institute in brokering the curriculum offerings of established providers. It is distinctive, however, in lacking degree granting authority of its own.

This unique structure enabled the Commonwealth to avoid extending its funding obligations for higher education students to registrants in Open Learning. This was critical for achieving increased system access without burgeoning cost increases for the government. The cost structure of the OLI was intended to be that of a commercial operation. The Commonwealth provided funds for establishment and development but operating costs were to be met by revenue from students. The initiative was expected to become self-funding after three years. The viability of the project within the parameters set, consequently became a major consideration in curriculum policy formation.

At the level of implementation, major features of the curriculum were already set by frames determined at federal level. The task of the implementors was to provide the services specified within cost and management structures which were also set and to mould the pre-existing curriculum of the television trial into a full degree program with little or no lead time for planning.

Not surprisingly under these circumstances, curriculum formation was largely administratively driven and subject to the vagaries of politics, pragmatism, serendipity and available tender submissions. Curriculum development 'on the run' characterised the program's initial implementation as the essentially continuing education program inherited from the TVOLP trial was converted to a degree program with little lead time for curriculum planning.

In the commercial marketplace, there is very often a direct correlation between quality and price, provided competition exists. If it does not, there is a tendency to charge whatever the market will bear. The achievement of a quality product with quality service is a costly and also frequently a time-consuming business. Despite this, there was little consideration that reduced funding levels and short time frames might jeopardise quality. In the main, intentions were focussed, not on the quality of service to students, but rather the quantity of educational provision and its cost. To this end, quality was addressed in terms of parity of esteem and academic standards.

To summarise, the primary intention of the Open Learning Initiative was to open access to university degree study without incurring unacceptable, additional, funding obligations on the Commonwealth. This intention was politically expedient in terms of responding to demand for increased provision of higher education while, at the same time, containing the budget deficit. Resolution of the funding issue was achieved, as it had been in other areas of government responsibility such as retirement funding, through a strategy of transferring fiscal responsibility to the private sector and end-users. These intentions, together with the specification of television as a delivery component, set the parameters within which further intentions crystallised.

If successful, the substantially restricted cost levels demonstrated by the Initiative are likely to have far reaching implications for the higher education system as a whole. There is still a large question mark, however, about the educational effectiveness, quality and financial viability of the Initiative. Just how accessible, marketable and worthwhile will such an easy access, low cost, user-pays option for higher education be? In part answer to this question, it is appropriate, in the following chapter, to examine the experiences of students registered with the program. The policies and curriculum structures described in this chapter formed part of the context within which students made their curriculum decisions.

Endnotes

1. Calvert (24.5.93, pers. com.) also sees the centralist agenda in the Open Learning Initiative.

2. For example, Johnson (1983a), the Hudson Report (1986), Sharma (1986) and SCEET (1988).

3. The funding apportionment was set at 15% of the EFTSU (Effective Full-Time Student Unit) rate until 1992 when an increase to 25% was planned (Dawkins, 1988d:16).

4. This figure had been recommended by the SCES and derived from advice on economies of scale provided by the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education (Johnson, in press).

5. In 1961, the ABC had sought to establish a University of the Air with the cooperation of the AV-CC (Greig, 1987). However, without the status of contributing to degrees and without university institutional commitment, the programs took on a continuing education character and were not maintained. Similarly, the support for programs run by the Learning Network on the ABC and SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) in 1987 was inadequate for their continuation (Black and Moodie, 1991; Moodie, 1992a).

6. NDEC has since been disbanded and replaced by the more formal National Committee on Open and Distance Education (NCODE).

7. Nevertheless, the Commonwealth reaffirmed its intention of maintaining the DEC system and funding apportionment for, at least, an initial period of five years (Baldwin, 1991a:46) even though there was general dissatisfaction with the DEC system both within and outside DEET (National Board of Employment, Education and Training [NBEET], 1992:24,29).

8. In contrast to the opinion expressed in the Green paper, Marceau (1993:1) and Karmel (1989:8), considered Australia's rates of participation as comparable with those of other OECD countries.

9. Units on offer during the trial project were *Australian Studies* from Griffith University, *Anthropology* and *Statistics* from Deakin University, *French* and *Australian Environmental Studies* from the University of New England, *Marketing* from Monash University and *Religion Studies* which was offered jointly by Deakin University and the University of South Australia (TVOLP Consortium, 1991:6).

10. The UKOU broadcasts no more than 15% of the course material for its foundation courses but has a different approach, integrating broadcast material more

closely with the entire learning package (Moodie, 1991:7).

11. This strategy contrasted with the fully integrated approach to curriculum content employed by the UKOU (e.g. Perry, W., 1972:34) but was considered preferable within the organisational and funding structure of the project. The TVOLP was a short term project with limited funds, whereas the UKOU had long term funding commitment for course development.

12. The TVOLP has been criticised for not fully exploiting the educational potential of the television medium and for allowing the technology and the agenda of the ABC to drive the curriculum (Walker, R., 1992, also 24.5.1993, pers. com.). It was suggested that alternative pedagogical strategies such as the use of video cassettes rather than broadcast or use of 'big E' television would have been more appropriate. In response to these criticisms, Moodie (1992b:6) considered the ABC's approach to have been vindicated by large audiences of whom only a very small proportion were students registered in the accompanying units and by favourable student reaction to the television component.

13. Calculated from dates published in the progress report dated April 23, 1993 (OLAA, 1993c). The third study period ended on December 3, 1993. Its examination period was 14-18 March 1994.

14. Moodie (1992c:3) reported that, by the time the first TVOLP study period began, some 40,000 enquiries had been received and more than 4,000 people had ordered study materials. Seventy-five percent of purchasers indicated an intention to undertake the assessment while students completing initial items of assessment performed at least as well as their conventional counterparts.

15. Subject to financial viability, curriculum delivery is guaranteed for ten years as a condition of the Agreement between the Commonwealth and the Open Learning Agency of Australia (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993:5,17).

16. In subsequent study periods, Year 13 programs were also organised in Queensland through Griffith University and in Western Australia through Curtin University (Monash University, circa 1993c; Senate Inquiry, 1994:39).

17. This brokerage mechanism was specified in the call for expressions of interest in an open learning initiative (DEET, 1992b).

18. Precedents for charging fees existed in private university tuition, in the HECS fee, and in the practice of non-award registrations which provided a mechanism for fee-paying students to study and cash in their accumulated credits for a degree at a later date.

19. During 1993, Open Learning students did not have the option of deferring payment as was possible with HECS. This option was subsequently extended to Open Learning students undertaking at least 75% of a full-time load from 1994 (Beazley, 1993:10).

20. Similar funding levels apply in the HKOLI (Johnson, 1990b:75).

21. Harman's (1991) study of internal and external load revealed savings of between 1% and 10% for external provision in most cases. Harman suggested that these small efficiency increases may be the result of deliberate action by the DECs to overstate their external studies costs in an attempt to maintain current funding levels. Alternatively, the close integration of internal and external courses in Australian distance teaching may have militated against the realisation of savings obtainable with the UKOU model of distance education whose courses had a much larger audience and longer shelf life.

22. Unit adaptation funding of $5,700 was available for each successful tenderer (OLAA, 1993f).

23. For example, Open Learning was viable for Griffith University because of existing courseware (Whitlock, 12.7.93, pers. com.).

24. The Agreement with the Commonwealth specified the provision of "telephone contact numbers and arrangements whereby participants may pursue administrative and academic queries for not less than three quarters of an hour's duration" (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993, Schedule 1:4). However, this was included for costing purposes and not intended as a specification for tutorial support (Moodie, 24.5.93 pers. com.). In any case, course advice provided by OLA's student advisers might well qualify as academic advice in satisfaction of this contractual obligation.

25. The UKOU had demonstrated a similar concern for parity which it addressed through its academic advisory committees and a system of external examiners (e.g. Perry, W., 1972:32).

26. An ongoing stumbling block in achieving parity stems from the conception of graduate quality in terms of the process of the educational experience rather than in terms of examinable competence (Jevons, 1984; Moodie, 1991). Since distance education courses rely on different teaching and learning processes, they have been less highly regarded than their on-campus counterparts.

27. While the Academic Programs Board adopted an agreement on quality (viz. OLAA, 1993e) which specified performance targets and review processes for unit provision (OLAA APB, 1993a:6 minute no. 35) and was considering a proposal for formal endorsement of teachers and providers of student support services (OLAA APB, 1993c:6 minute no. 36), a paper prepared by the OLA Secretariat (1993) proposing specific targets and review mechanisms for provider and central office services proceeded no further than receiving the Board's consideration (OLAA APB, 1993a:5 minute no. 28).

28. A contract for the evaluation of the Initiative as required in the Agreement with the Commonwealth (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993 schedule 2:7) was awarded to a team from Melbourne University's Centre for the Study of Higher Education. Its interim report was submitted in April, 1995 (Healy, 1995:23).

29. There were concerns about the adequacy of the funding set aside for provider services and the apportionment of funds between unit providers and central services, which was specified as a 2:1 split respectively (e.g. Open Learning Agency of Australia Interim Planning Committee [OLAA IPC], 1992a:1 minute nos. 2-4).

30. Although planning for the Initiative had begun prior to the call for expressions of interest in July 1992, contractual arrangements with the Commonwealth were finalised less than two months before the new program began in March 1993.

31. A resolution of this tension has been proposed by Pargetter through a system of common and endorsed units (OLAA APB, 1993b:1 minute no. 3). Whereas common units offered through the tender process would be coordinated by OLA through its tender invitations and would receive general credit, endorsed units would allow a diversity of more specialised offerings (Moodie, 26.5.93, pers. com.).

32. Identified as disadvantaged were people from low socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women, people of non-English-speaking backgrounds, people with disabilities and those from rural and isolated areas (DEET, 1990a:10; 1990c:2). Participation statistics suggest that people of NESB actually have higher than average participation rates (Williams et al., 1993:58; DEET, 1991). Particular migrant groups, however, are under-represented (Dawkins 1987:21).

33. Open entry was implemented through the absence of prerequisites and quotas on student numbers and through a requirement that prerequisites for higher level units be achievable through Open Learning (OLAA, 1993a:5). Residential school attendance was also precluded (OLAA, 1993f:4,6). Unlimited access was balanced against the commercial risk of securing texts by a proviso that, in the event of a shortage of textbooks, students could be advised to defer (OLAA, 1993a:11).

34. Discussed at a seminar on Open Learning at Monash University on 26.5.93 attended by Ms. P. Lister, Mr. G. Moodie, Prof. M. Quartly, Mr. J. Scheffer, Prof. P. Spearitt and the author.

35. As for previous endnote.

36. Discussed at a meeting of staff involved in Open Learning at Deakin University, on 24.5.93. Present were J. Calvert, R. Gollan, J. Hughes, J. Reid, D. Walker, I. Weeks, G. Moodie, and the author.

Chapter 6

LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES AS CURRICULUM DECISION-MAKERS IN OPEN LEARNING

6.1 Introduction

Having dealt with open learning as an element of social theory in Chapter 4 and as an intended curriculum in Chapter 5, the present chapter focusses on the Initiative as a perceived learning experience. It thus deals with the third curriculum conception of open learning specified in the framework for analysis. In investigating the student learning experience, students are considered as curriculum decision-makers as previously discussed (see page 35). This approach was derived from conceptualisations of open learning emphasising learner control of the curriculum, and from broader analysis of curriculum control as a social phenomenon.

It has been postulated that a number of curriculum control points become the students' prerogative in open learning programs. These control points relate to the 'who', 'what', 'where', 'when', 'how' and 'why' of learning. By considering learners as decision-makers, the extent to which such a learner-control model is appropriate to the Australian OLI can be tested. In essence, the aim is to examine the extent to which theoretically postulated shifts in the loci of curriculum control towards learners were realised in students' experience and to examine the openness of the program from the perspective of students.

Curriculum control by learners is just one of a number of theoretical conceptions of open learning, as shown in Chapter 4. The framework of curriculum control, nevertheless, remains an appropriate way of comparing the Initiative with a range of theoretical views because the framework allows for identification of alternative theoretical explanations via the curriculum control structures they imply. Whether conceived as a method of extending access, a means of allowing students greater control of curriculum or as a means of implementing a vision of emancipation or self-directed learning, open learning can be interpreted as providing learners with choices and control at various curriculum decision points, to varying degrees and for various reasons. For example, a focus on open learning as a method of opening access implies increased learner control over admission but little change to other control points.

Studying learners as curriculum decision-makers provides insights into their learning experiences while at the same time revealing the extent, nature and constraints on their control over curriculum. The focus is on what **students** decided and why, on the knowledge base informing their decisions and on learners' plans about forthcoming decisions. This provides a lens into the openness of the Initiative from the students' perspective which is compared with theoretical conceptions of open learning and the intentions of the Initiative's planners in the following chapter.

The experienced curriculum is introduced with a selection of personalised vignettes. Following these, the nature of learners' experiences as curriculum decision-makers in the program is examined from aggregated data compiled from the entire student sample.

It appears that learners did, indeed, make curriculum decisions but their perspective differed from the theoretical perspective implied by the model of learner control. Because of this, it is not appropriate to report learners' experiences solely in terms of curriculum control points. Instead, a general account of learners' curriculum decision-making is provided. The account employs the frame and decision-making space concepts as defined in Chapter 2. In terms of these analytical tools, curriculum structures prove to be strong frames on learners' decision-making.

6.2 Vignettes of learners' experiences

Before discussing the experienced curriculum in generalised terms, the experiences of five students are described from an holistic and individualised perspective. These ground the abstractions which follow in a personalised and realistic way and provide an indication of the range of experience encountered in the research.

These personal stories are presented as short vignettes using pseudonyms. The criteria used to select these five from the interviewed sample were as follows. Firstly, they were chosen to provide clear comparisons and contrasts between the experiences of students in the total data set. Secondly, they were selected to demonstrate points of similarity and difference amongst the analytical concepts discussed later in the chapter with reference to the entire data set. On this basis, learners from a range of contextual circumstances, displaying a variety of personal attributes and encountering a cross-section of curriculum experience were chosen. The aim in telling each of the narratives is to demonstrate the personal significance and context of learners' experiences of decision-making in the OLI, and to exhibit the framing influence of curriculum structures.

6.2.1 Vignette 1: Bruce

Bruce, a musician in his mid-forties, was studying mathematics, statistics and accounting through OLA. This constituted three-quarters of a full-time study load. He would dearly have loved to have been able to attend university full-time on-campus but needed to continue to support his family, as best he could, while he studied. Bruce was "madly interested in computers" and was hoping to establish himself in a new career following the collapse of his music company during the recession.

Bruce had a keen mind and really enjoyed his units, particularly the maths. He found the universities he dealt with helpful and developed his own way of studying rather than that recommended in the study guides. Bruce preferred to study in bouts during which he would "binge" for a few days, tackling topics as they appealed to him, provided nothing was dragging behind. He preferred to study from the text book and often worked ahead of the television programs and scheduled lessons. He enjoyed thinking up research problems for which the statistics he was studying would be applicable. The good grades Bruce attained were no surprise given his intrinsic interest, continued application and deep approach to learning.

For Bruce, studying this way worked well and whetted his appetite to learn more. He remained keen to pursue his interest in maths which presented a difficulty because further subjects were not at that time available through OLA and no-one could tell him definitely when, or if, they would come on-stream. Obtaining information on available courses at other universities was a complicated task, and he had been unaware of the existence of the external studies directory.

Bruce appreciated being able to study at his own pace, in his own "comfort zone" and in his own way and was thus aware that Open Learning allowed him discretion over 'how', 'when', 'where' and 'why' he studied. He was, nevertheless, sceptical that learner control over other aspects of curriculum would be feasible at undergraduate level without jeopardising standards or creating burdensome administrative complications.

At last contact, Bruce was considering his options for continuing his study of maths and computing. It seemed likely that he would attempt to enrol as an external student but the university with whom he had studied maths and statistics, and with whom he had already developed a favourable familiarity, was not an option as they had no suitable courses on offer.

6.2.2 Vignette 2: Mavis

Mavis also seemed to breeze through her studies as she was a fluent speaker of French and Spanish which she was studying, an avid reader and intrinsically interested in her non-language units. Mavis had been a development worker overseas and was studying to shore up her credentials as a language tutor as well as for her own personal satisfaction and continuing education. As she was expecting to be overseas for part of the year, Open Learning allowed her to continue her studies while away.

Mavis had begun her studies during 1992 through the TVOLP and, thus, was taking some second level units when contacted. She liked to work through all the set language exercises even though she could do them very quickly. She noted a big difference in the quality of support and feedback provided by the two different universities for her language units and was concerned enough about the difficulties she presumed "greenhorns" would be facing without much support at one of these to try to make contact with nearby students from a circulated list to offer her help.

Mavis found herself unable to limit her curiosity to the prescribed parts of readings but solved this problem by only ordering a few library books at a time, in order to indulge her interest.

After studying anthropology through OLA, Mavis was keen to major in this field. She had made enquiries at a number of universities but was attracted to an on-campus Bachelor of Arts which would credit her studies through OLA. At this stage, only one university offered such degrees and other participating universities were unclear about how this credit would translate to their usual degrees.

Her friends had triggered a concern that the general degree offered entirely via Open Learning might be perceived as something of a "rinky-dink" degree, as no third year studies were required. She, herself, felt it would be quite a demanding course because it required study across a number of disciplinary fields including maths-science which was not her forte. To complete the Arts degree, Mavis needed to compete for an on-campus place and, if successful in this, would need to move to Melbourne to finish her studies.

The pathway to Arts was paved with uncertainty and confusion but Mavis tackled this with a calm and patient tolerance which was difficult to understand. The confusion she faced lay firstly, in the incompatibility of the point systems between Open Learning units and Monash Arts subjects and, secondly, in the lack of clear policy about sequences and prerequisites for particular subject majors. The point clash might necessitate studying additional units through OLA and exceeding the point requirement for entry to Arts simply in order to reach it. This was neither cost nor time efficient from Mavis' point of view since she survived on the income of her part-time tutoring while living frugally in her father's home. Considerations of a monetary nature, as well as time and effort, were important to her. The problem caused by lack of curriculum policy concerned specific subjects which she might be able to credit towards her Arts degree. Would religion be classified as an Arts creditable subject or not?

Mavis was very grateful for the opportunity to study which the OLI provided, mindful of her advancing age, and of the opinion that young people should have preference for university places. This possibly accounts for her patience, for she regarded aspects of the service she had received as "just not good enough". As an example, at the beginning of the second study period in 1993, she found herself being welcomed to first level, double units she had half-completed, but unregistered for units she had recently paid $1200 to undertake. It was weeks into the study period, many, many phone calls, considerable frustration and frayed nerves before this matter was resolved and she could begin the new material.

Later in the study period, Mavis discovered herself to be unregistered for the examination in another unit although she had received the materials for it and had been submitting the assignments. Before this administrative 'blip' was eventually resolved, she faced the prospect of being required to defer the examination in that unit to the end of the next study period. This would have meant sitting the examination after a considerable space of time since having studied the unit. It would also have given her a very full examination load at that time as she would be taking up new units the following study period.

In our final conversation, Mavis informed me that she had decided to pay the fee to register her intention of applying for entry to the on-campus Arts course.

6.2.3 Vignette 3: Roe

Unlike Bruce and Mavis who were mature-age students, Roe had just finished grade twelve. She had always wanted to be a teacher but had not been offered a university place, either on-campus or externally, for which she had applied. The only remaining means of pursing her ambition was through OLA, so Roe registered for child development and psychology believing that it would soon be possible to qualify as a teacher by this means.

Roe knew she needed "to be taught" and "guided" and found the study guides and the television components very helpful in this regard. Nevertheless, she still felt that she would have preferred interaction with her teachers. She was hopeful of contacting other students but was told she was the only student in her area studying child development. She found that with Open Learning units she had to teach herself and this proved difficult for her.

Roe was worried because her first three assignments had failed to gain a passing grade but was encouraged that part of the problem was with incorrect referencing and part with an incomplete response which she would endeavour to remedy. She had been uncertain of the meaning of one question and having exhausted local resources such as friends and texts, submitted the assignment without checking with university staff. Roe did voluntary work at a local kindergarten/child care centre and was concerned about the cost of tutorials.

News of the referencing problem, in the form of her first assignment returned, arrived the day before the next assignment was due to be posted, and necessitated a panic visit to the library to make the necessary corrections. This corrected assignment was more successful. Roe had also contacted a tutor this time but felt that, as the second task was a lot easier than the first (an opinion also held by other students of the same unit), she had probably gained little from the expense.

At the end of the study period, Roe decided to suspend her studies until the

September session because she wanted to know how she was progressing before proceeding. Some ten weeks after the first study period had ended, with just two and a half weeks until the end of the second study period, Roe still had no news of her results in either of her examinations leaving her "up in the air" and uncertain about her future plans. She was pleased to have been offered paid work at the centre but her decision processes on future study were stalled for the time being by lack of feedback and lack of options.

6.2.4 Vignette 4: Douglas

As a electrician on an isolated mining site, Douglas was interested in continuing his education and stretching his mind beyond the dominant community interest of football. He registered for psychology out of interest and was initially concerned that he would not be able to squeeze study into his life as he was working a fifty hour week. Before hearing about Open Learning, he had been unaware of university distance education.

Douglas found the study difficult and found himself unprepared for the discipline and commitment required. He estimated he would need to spend around double the time suggested to do the lessons properly. On this attempt, he decided to give a higher priority to enjoying his Easter vacation than studying. He half-completed the first assignment but could not finish it before the deadline whereupon he gave up all thought of submitting work for assessment in that study period.

He continued taping the television broadcasts as he found the subject interesting and was considering trying again at a later stage. Even though the university tried to contact him when his assignment was not received, he did not respond or consider a deferral as his decision to stop studying this study period had already been made.

6.2.5 Vignette 5: Beth

Beth chose Open Learning because arthritis made it difficult to attend on-campus -

walking was painful and she tired easily. She was hoping to retrain as an accountant and work from home as she felt she would be unable to return to library work. Beth held an Arts degree and had been out of the workforce for ten years rearing a family. She was now divorced and seeking a means of supporting herself.

Although she had once worked for an accountant, she found her mathematics and accounting knowledge badly rusty and out of date. She felt women who cared for their families at home paid a high penalty with respect to their career prospects.

It took her a full week to master the calculator with the instructions that came with it and, after that, she found she needed to spend twenty hours a week on each of her two units to keep up. This was the case even though she had followed the statistics course in the previous study period as a preparation.

Beth had begun the process of hiring a local tutor when serious family problems arose. These involved court appearances, brought her to the brink of a nervous breakdown and badly affected her health. At about week five of the study period, Beth applied, in a telephone request, to withdraw from her studies on medical grounds and was told there was a no refund policy. She then asked to defer but was told this was not possible either. Beth felt this was extremely unfair. She expected that, with a medical certificate, some accommodation would have been possible had she been studying with "an ordinary university".

Unknown to Beth, many of the individual universities, including those providing her units, did, in fact, have deferral policies with varying fee penalties according to the amount of the unit already undertaken. This was not brought to her attention when she asked to defer. What is more, OLA was obliged to give refunds in cases where materials were not supplied. Beth had received assignments for accounting but not for statistics. On these grounds, she was entitled to a refund for one unit but she was unaware of this. She received a phone call to ask if she was receiving assignments and, in error and not caring, she said: "Yes, but I am going to withdraw".

Later, when Beth realised she hadn't received the assignments for statistics, she phoned again. She was told that the assignments had been sent and that, therefore, it was assumed that she had received them. Beth found it hard to blame the postal service, especially as she had a post box number, but doubted she could prove that she hadn't received the assessment tasks.

Beth was angry and disappointed. She decided to take a break from study but was convinced that, if she ever returned to it, she would not study by Open Learning. She had initially been attracted to this mode of study because of her disability[1].

Beth's experience is not typical of the sample studied. It is not that her experiences were, in themselves, atypical but rather that, in her case, unfavourable events and circumstances compounded each other. The case is included for this very reason and also because of its equity implications.

6.3 Learners' curriculum decision-making

These vignettes of learners' experiences exemplify that each student in the sample had a unique story to tell. Each had his or her own aspirations and reasons for studying, each encountered a unique personal, learning environment, and each had individual problems which were tackled in different ways. Yet even though each learner's experience was different, there was also a commonality to their experiences. The remainder of the chapter is based on analysis of the aggregated data of the entire sample.

It seemed significant that studying with Open Learning was rarely a trivial pursuit for learners but something important to each person as a means of controlling the direction of some aspect of their lives. Learners were prepared to invest time, money and effort into their studies and this reflected their personal commitments to reaching their goals.

The prime concern of learners was not curriculum control per se but, rather, the achievement of their individual aims in as economical and satisfactory a way as possible, or, if this was not appropriate, the redefinition of those goals to the learner's own satisfaction. Learners were only secondarily interested in controlling curriculum as a means of controlling progress towards these ends. For this reason, learners' experiences of Open Learning needed to be understood within the framework of their own expectations of the program and their decision-making about these broader goals within their own personal learning contexts.

On the whole, theoretical conceptions of open learning and notions of curriculum control were foreign to students as was any conscious appreciation of a power shift in their direction. Students were best described and, indeed, saw themselves primarily as **curriculum-takers**, undertaking a university course which, access aside, put them on a par with conventional university students as far as curriculum control was concerned. Students nevertheless appreciated the flexibility of Open Learning which allowed them a degree of discretion or control over the way they studied. This was comparable to studying in the distance mode.

By participating in Open Learning, students were acting strategically to control aspects of their lives and achieve their individual ambitions. They appeared to be acting in accordance with **mental plans** they had constructed which often incorporated a **hierarchy of goals** directed at achieving their overall purpose. The manner and means of achieving these goals comprised learners' **goal-attainment strategies**. The distinction between goal and strategy is that a goal signifies a projected outcome whereas a strategy is the action planned to achieve it. Plans, on the other hand, link goals, strategies, means and the timing of strategy implementation in unified wholes. For these students, their strategies and plans included opting for a structured, teacher-controlled, learning situation rather than autodidaxy for reasons of credentialling or for the guidance such a structured course offered.

In a phenomenographic study, Karlsson (1987) distinguished the essence of decision-making, as opposed to choice-taking, to be a focus on the initiation or course of important life projects. Decision-making involved a commitment to realising a potential future, rather than a more limited selection between offered alternatives on less consequential matters. Decisions, in this sense, incorporate the notion of human agency stemming from the power of the mind to imagine a potential future and from the power of intentions to direct future actions and events.

Student participation in Open Learning involved decision-making in this phenomenographic sense because learners were indeed studying as part of significant life projects. On less significant issues such as the selection of assignment topics, choice-taking was also involved. Yet even though a conceptual distinction can be made between decision-making and choice- taking, learners' curriculum decisions were not differentiated in this respect. The two terms are used somewhat loosely. Reasons for this include the undefined, and probably variable, level of personal significance required to separate a choice from a decision and the intertwining of curriculum choices with the implementation of higher-order decisions.

Learners' curriculum decision-making focussed on three decision areas: namely, entry (or access), study management, and persistence. Examining each of these reveals something of value for comparison with theoretical conceptions of open learning and the intended curriculum. However, persistence decision-making is particularly valuable in this respect because, during this process, learners reassessed their goal-attainment strategies in the light of their experiences. In effect, persistence decisions provided an updated, personal evaluation of the efficacy of the established curriculum of the OLI as a means of reaching learners' goals and fulfilling their academic needs within their current circumstances.

In the literature, persistence is frequently discussed in terms of 'drop-out', 'survival', 'attrition' or 'wastage' (e.g. Peters, O., 1992; Tinto, 1975, 1982). These terms reflect the perspective of providers concerned with enrolment and completion statistics as indicators of their own performance rather than the thinking of students. In order to convey the perspective of learners for whom discontinuing their Open Learning studies was part of a process of monitoring and adjusting their strategies and goals, the concept of persistence has been used in preference to these alternatives in this study.

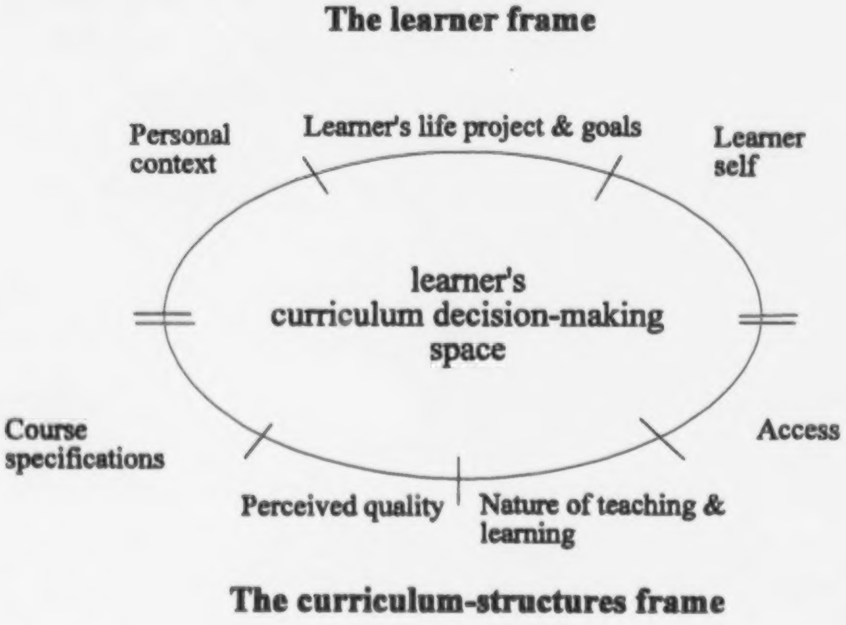
The vignettes illustrate that learners made their curriculum decisions on the basis of their own individual knowledge and perceptions of reality and within perceived boundaries or constraints which were partially or entirely outside of their control. The concept of perceived decision-making space, limited by externally set frames, is thus as applicable to the curriculum decision-making of learners as it was to that of teachers in D. Smith's (1983a) study. The specific nature of these frames and their sub-elements provides an insight into the openness of the program in learners' experience.

6.3.1 Frames for learners' decision-making

The remainder of this chapter is based on interviews with 44 students according to the methodology discussed in Chapter 3. These aggregated data suggest two main frames which limited learners' decision-making. These are the learner frame and the curriculum-structures frame respectively. Each of these is composed of a number of sub-frames as depicted in Figure 4. In effect, individual learners made their plans and decisions within a perceived decision-making space bounded by frames relating to the learner's situation and self, on the one hand, and curriculum structures, on the other. Learners' knowledge of these frames combined in a unique way to set the available options for each individual because each learner and context was unique.

Figure 4

Frames and sub-frames defining a learner's curriculum decision-making space


The learner frame
Personal context
Learner's life project & goals
Learner self
learner's curriculum decision-making space
Course specifications
Access
Perceived quality
Nature of teaching & learning
The curriculum-structures frame

Sub-frames within the **learner frame** include:

- the learners' life project and **goals**,
- the learners' personal **context** of commitments, circumstances and resources, and
- the **learner-self** which includes personal attributes such as competencies, qualifications, attitudes and learning styles.

The **curriculum-structures frame** comprises the curriculum established by providers. It includes the learning and teaching responsibilities of both learners and providers as determined by providers. This frame extends beyond the policies and offerings flowing from the OLI to include any curriculum structures which could potentially offer a means of reaching learners' goals. It includes the course offerings and curriculum policies of competing institutions as well as linkages between institutions in the form of their credit articulation policies and practices.

In principle, the curriculum-structures frame would include course details for each institutional option considered by each learner. However, learners were not generally fully informed and their awareness of the actual options and frames was often incomplete. Learners' knowledge of potential options was also limited by the information disseminating practices of providers.

Learners considered four sub-frames within the curriculum-structures frame as they made their curriculum decisions. Each of these relates to the OLI as well as other institutions. The sub-frames relate to:

- **access** which includes quotas, admission policy and credit transfer policy,
- the **nature of teaching and learning** for each option. This centres on mode of delivery but encompasses pedagogical technique, support and timing,
- **course specifications** such as content, assessment, degree requirements, credit, costs, and texts, and
- perceived **quality** of service.

The distinction between the second and third sub-frames was a matter of perception. The nature of teaching and learning framed decisions about whether the learner could study successfully in this manner while course specifications were needed to plan a program of study that would lead to the desired goal. A given feature of a course (e.g. time limit for completion) could contribute to both of these sub-frames.

Students used knowledge on the first three of these sub-frames in making their entry decisions but did not refer to the perceived quality sub-frame at this point. This latter sub-frame figured only in students' study management and persistence decision-making. It should be noted that perceived quality of service is not the same as perceived status which could be considered at entry as part of the course specifications sub-frame. Learners judged quality of service according to their expectations. This is a different conception of quality from the one often used in the commercial world in which quality is seen in terms of meeting customer needs (Juran and Gryna, 1988).

Decision-making, including the formulation of learners' goals, involved exploration of a decision space formed by the amalgam and interaction of the learner and curriculum-structures frames and their respective sub-frames.

The model of learner control presented in Chapter 2 suggested that learner control was dependent upon three components: namely, learners' rights and responsibilities, the resources available to them and their individual competencies (see page 51-52). The present data confirm the importance of each of these components of the model but also reveal another important frame which is not accounted for in this model. Learners' rights in the model are equivalent to policies determined by the curriculum-structures frame in this study. Their learning responsibilities are similarly determined by curriculum policy particularly that related to the nature of teaching and learning sub-frame of the curriculum-structures frame. Learners' competencies are components of the learner-self sub-frame and these can be expected to be influenced by learners' commitments to their goals. Thus, all three elements of the learner control model are confirmed by the study. However, there is evidence that the learner's context is an additional significant constraint on student decision-making and this needs to be included in the model.

To reiterate, studying through Open Learning was, generally, a strategy within a plan enacted by learners to control their progress towards the sequential achievement of a hierarchy of goals which would culminate, if successful, in the realisation of their life projects. To this end, learners made curriculum decisions within the limitations of their knowledge of frames imposed both by curriculum structures and their personal situation.

Having discussed the general nature of learners' curriculum decision-making, it is appropriate to consider decision-making on entry, study management and persistence more closely with a view to determining the nature and extent of learners' control of curriculum and the openness of the Initiative in learners' experience. As previously stressed, learners' experiences are presented within the context of their decision-making on their life projects. This is because the concept of curriculum control was foreign to learners and also because learners' curriculum decisions were, generally, aimed at achieving goals with a personal significance beyond the immediate study experience. Decision-making on the three decision areas of beginning a program of study, managing the learning experience and persisting with Open Learning are considered in turn.

6.4 Entry decision-making

Information on learners' decisions to enter the program was only available from retrospective accounts. Pertinent themes included learners' reasons for studying, their reasons for choosing to study through OLA, their plans and expectations about studying this way and future academic plans. Entry decision-making and learners' control over access were also illuminated through learners' later reflections on the efficacy of their original entry decisions. Learners' entry decision-making is discussed in terms of their life projects and academic goals, their goal-attainment strategies and the decision space offered by Open Learning.

6.4.1 Learners' life projects

In reporting their reasons for studying, learners commonly referred to a combination of aims, purposes and motivations driving their plans and projects. Studying was viewed sometimes as a means, sometimes as an end, and sometimes as both, but, in any case, was seen as part of a broader project of personal significance to each individual. Studying by Open Learning was, thus, a strategy aimed at realising some desirable state of being, through achievement of a hierarchy of goals subservient to the central project. In some cases, studying was an exploratory strategy or trial designed to assist learners elaborate their decision-making space as a basis for future decisions. It could be that the strategy of studying through Open Learning was being trialled or that the student was in the process of defining a suitable project.

Learners' goals were examined at three levels: their life projects, their long-term academic goals and their immediate academic goals. Roe's central goal or life project, for example, was to be a teacher. As an intermediate goal towards that end, she set qualifying in Education as her long-term academic goal and, in the short term, aimed to study particular units through OLA at a pace and timing convenient to herself within the limits allowed. Her strategy was to study through OLA since this was the only option available to her and since she was also under the false impression that she would be able to complete her teaching qualifications through this pathway in the near future. The strategy Mavis eventually decided upon, on the other hand, was to use her Open Learning credit towards an on-campus Bachelor of Arts which she desired as a vocational credential and for her own personal development and continuing education.

Learners' life projects acted as organising foci towards which subsidiary academic goals and specific plans and strategies for achieving them were directed. The 'what' and 'why' of learners' curriculum decisions flowed from their central projects as these were refined and developed in the light of knowledge of curriculum-structures and learner frames. For a few students, ultimate goal attainment was potentially attainable directly through Open Learning, as, for example, in cases where personal development, continuing education, or learning as a hobby was the central life project. In other cases, the strategy of studying this way was intended to increase the likelihood of realising the ultimate goal.

As previously noted, learners' reasons for studying contained a variety of aims, purposes and motivations related to their central projects. In a study with students of the UKOU, such reasons were called 'orientations to study' and classified as either academic, vocational and/or personal (Taylor, Gibbs and Morgan, 1981). Along another dimension, the same study classified orientations to study according to whether the goal was of purely personal value or sought for some form of external recognition, that is as either intrinsic or extrinsic, respectively. This schema proved applicable to the present sample. However, whereas Taylor et al., (1981) identified a predominance of personal orientations, the present sample contained a strong emphasis on vocational projects. At the same time, this vocational emphasis was not overly instrumental because career intentions were mingled with intrinsic interest in personal development, performance enhancement, educational advancement and intellectual curiosity.

Vocational projects, in the present sample, involved learners' careers and means of earning a living. Those of an extrinsic nature concerned initial skilling or credentialling for employment in a chosen career, reskilling or credentialling for a career change, or upgrading for promotion. Cases included school leavers seeking initial qualifications, the unemployed seeking to retrain,

and working people attempting to change direction or improve their career prospects. One case of reskilling related to a life project of staying out of jail.

When learners' career goals concerned upgrading and improving skills to do a job better or when a personal interest in the subject was expressed, the career project took on an intrinsic character. As an example, one farmer was studying accountancy in order to better manage the family farm.

The vocational emphasis was evident in all fields of study and not restricted to learners studying units with direct vocational links such as marketing and statistics. Nevertheless, Keepes (1993) noted an increase in registrations in vocationally relevant units in OLA in 1993 compared with 1992 during the trial TVOLP. This shift towards vocational units is consistent with, and possibly responsive to, the reoriented marketing of television open learning from 'a taste of university study' in

1992 to 'degrees by Open Learning' in 1993 (Joy, 26.5.93, pers. com.; Keepes, 1993). This was accompanied by re-structuring of the curriculum offering to encourage only assessment-geared registrations. The prominence of vocational life projects held by learners could also be linked to the difficult economic and employment situation which was current at the time the study was undertaken.

Life projects of a personal nature were also strongly in evidence. In most cases, this involved intrinsic interest in personal development. Studying was expected to bring pleasure, personal growth or a sense of keeping up to date. Alternatively, it was seen as a satisfying means of passing the time and adding an interest in life. The personal extrinsic orientation to study was rare. Only rarely were learners attempting to prove their ability to others or trying to compensate for a feeling of being deprived of education in the past.

Projects of an academic nature were less common than vocational or personal ones. Some learners were pursuing their intellectual interests (an academic intrinsic orientation). Others wanted to advance their education or gain a degree (an academic extrinsic orientation).

In a study of on-campus students, Beaty (1978) identified an orientation to study referred to as a **social orientation**. Students with this orientation attended university for the social experience it was expected to provide. As might be expected in a study involving the distance mode, there were no learners reporting such reasons for studying in the present sample. Taylor et al. (1981) reported a similar finding.

6.4.2 Learners' academic goals

Early in the study period, almost three-quarters of the sample were aiming to complete a university degree and around a third of these were thinking of completing their degree through Open Learning. The others were either studying isolated units or were undecided about their academic goals.

Learners' choices of courses and units were influenced by all the frames and sub-frames identified with the exception of the quality sub-frame which was not an issue at this decision point. Within the boundaries of these frames, unit selection was strategic. Learners chose their units from those available in line with their overall goals and the curriculum requirements needed for their attainment. Learners' interests, vocational and personal contexts and perceived academic strengths and weaknesses were taken into account.

Access aside, learners expected, and experienced, control over course and unit selection comparable with 'ordinary' university programs. That is, they expected that providers would determine the subject choices available and any prerequisites necessary for particular units. As there were no prerequisites specified for first level units, learners assumed that the content was suitable for someone without specific prior knowledge of the discipline. They also expected a similar quality of service as from a conventional university.

6.4.3 Learners' curriculum decision-making space

The OLI enlarged learners' potential decision-making space by establishing an option (that is, OLA) with unrestricted entry at a cost equivalent to HECS. For some learners, the opening of this option inspired new projects. For others, it offered a welcome, last resort for achieving a long-standing, but previously frustrated, ambition. For some, it was the only option for university study while, for others again, it was the preferred method of studying.

Even though the sample was not designed to be representative of Open Learning students as a whole, it is noteworthy that just over half of the learners interviewed perceived OLA to be the only option available to them for university study. For these students, it offered the only perceived decision space since, to the best of their knowledge, learner and curriculum structure frames interacted to preclude other alternatives from their consideration.

In specific terms, alternative decision spaces were perceived as closed either through failure of an entry application, lack of the necessary entry qualifications or because the closing date for applications had expired when the decision to study had been taken. In addition, aspects of the context sub-frame such as family, work or social commitments, personal disability and geographical isolation, even penal servitude, were other reasons that conventional or distance education courses with residential requirements were inaccessible. This implies that Open Learning units are attractive to those students who perceive themselves to be isolated.

Learners perceived barriers to traditional entry which were derived primarily from curriculum structures (e.g. quotas) indicating that, before the advent of OLA, curriculum structures had been framing access to the point of closure in many cases.

In view of the large numbers of students for whom OLA was the only available option, it would seem that the Initiative was attracting applicants who were contributing to unmet demand for places in the Unified National System of Higher Education. However, the fact that a number of learners had self-assessed themselves as ineligible for a university place, without applying, indicates that the traditional measure of unmet demand based on unplaced applicants underestimates the true parameter. There were other potential students who did not apply for traditional university study due to their own assessment of their entry qualifications and chances of placement success. Others had not applied because they were not aware of options such as distance education.

Students for whom OLA was the only option for university study, had virtually no control over the selection of mode of study independent of their decision about access. For them, it was study through OLA or not at all. Utilisation of this option was often a strategy to open other decision spaces and gain access to options currently perceived as closed. Learners with multiple options for university study, could select the mode or institution they preferred.

The number of learners who saw no other options open to them (OLA's captive market) indicates that the Initiative was indeed **opening access** to university study for students unable to study by other means. On the other hand, for a significant number of learners in the study, multiple study options were perceived to be accessible when the entry decision was taken indicating that, for these learners, OLA was the preferred mode of studying offering a **value added** alternative to conventional university study.

Learners' initial perceptions and expectations of Open Learning provide an insight into the nature of the perceived decision-making space it offers. This has positive as well as negative aspects which are considered in turn.

6.4.4 Decision space of Open Learning: Perceived advantages

For some learners, the added value of Open Learning arose from a perception of supporting and being a part of a new, exciting and worthwhile development in higher education in Australia. The Initiative was seen as breaking down an elitism of university entry. Mostly, however, its added value lay in the flexibility of open study to fit in with a variety of family, personal and work situations or in the convenience of studying at home, in one's own "comfort zone", in one's own time. Such advantages are commonly cited in the literature on open learning and apply to the distance mode of study in general. A new slant on these advantages was that this kind of study was less intrusive and disruptive of learners' daily lives.

Some more unusual advantages were also perceived. For example, the OLA option was preferred because it was seen as being environmentally friendly (saving petrol and pollution), because it gave clear, early statements of assessment tasks to focus on, and because it allowed the learner to remain anonymous - avoiding personality conflicts and the embarrassment felt in a class situation by people returning to study, of mature age or from a non-English-speaking background.

Not all learners were aware of university distance education options. Those who were aware, perceived added value, at entry, over this alternative, in the television presentation of first year units and in their accessibility without residential school attendance. Learners did see value in residential schools but, for some, compulsory attendance was prohibitive. The perception that Open Learning offered a lighter, slower load in terms of degree completion time, also added to its value for some learners. Learners made their plans within the reality of a ten year limit for Open Learning degrees, which was a more generous limit than allowed for other part-time degrees in Australia.

6.4.5 Decision space on Open Learning: Concerns at entry

On the other hand, learners expressed a number of concerns about studying by Open Learning. Their doubts centred on those things which seemed to threaten the efficacy of their goal-attainment strategies as a means of fulfilling their academic goals and realising their life projects. On the one hand, learners worried about their own abilities, idiosyncrasies and capacity to cope with the demands of the course within the context of their own personal life style, commitments and resources. On the other hand, they were concerned that the nature of Open Learning might not be adequate to their needs, goals and expectations, without over-burdening their capacities and resources. Any perceived, potential mismatch between learners' own capabilities, goals, needs and circumstances (the learner frame) and the outcomes and experiences they anticipated from studying with Open Learning (the curriculum-structures frame) were a source of concern.

At the learners' end of this matched set, concerns typical of the learner-self and the context sub-frames were strongly in evidence. As might be expected, contextual concerns revolved around fitting study into lives that were, for many, already crowded with work, family and social activities, or around coping with circumstances that might not be conducive to learning, for example, a difficult home environment or a long absence from study.

With regard to the learner-self, learners wondered how they would find or make the time to study, muster the necessary motivation or develop the organisational skills and discipline to simply "put in the hours and do the work". Some learners, particularly those with little previous education, a less than brilliant record of achievement or a long break from study, doubted their academic ability. Fear of failure and embarrassment as a consequence haunted more than a few.

Concerns of a personal and contextual nature evidence the existence and nature of these particular frames however, these are unlikely to be unique to the experience of studying with the OLI. Similar frames are likely to apply to decision-making about distance and on-campus study. On the other hand, some of the concerns derived from the curriculum-structures frame could well have been unique to the OLI and possibly, also unique to the inaugural study period.

The core of learners' concerns about curriculum structures centred on their responsibilities and entitlements when opting for this strategy. Studying on their own, without classroom interaction, was a responsibility that some learners found disconcerting when deciding to enter. The same applied to the financial demands of registration and buying texts. The worry, perhaps peculiar to the OLA option, was that its curriculum entitlements, in terms of units, sequences, degree offerings and credit transfer, might be inadequate for their needs. Learners were unsure about the study possibilities which would be opening up through this means, unsure whether degrees appropriate to their goals would become available and unsure whether Open Learning credit would be accepted by non-participating universities.

Compounding these uncertainties, learners found the handbook deficient as a source of information about curriculum frames. For example, it did not help in structuring degree sequences or designing transfers to on-campus courses. The handbook contained detail of the units on offer and, while another booklet on degree pathways was also available, this seems not to have been distributed before registration and not distributed to all learners.

6.4.6 Learners' goal-attainment strategies

Whether or not OLA was the only viable perceived option within a learner's decision-making space, it may or may not have been their preferred means of studying. Preferences related to the relative advantages and disadvantages perceived by each individual. Even amongst learners with no other options, and for whom other decision spaces were essentially closed, there were those who would have preferred the OLA option in any case. For these learners, it was the preferred option - not their second choice or a last resort.

Learners planned to use their Open Learning credit in a number of different ways in order to reach their goals. They displayed distinct goal-attainment strategies which proved to be linked to their available options and preferences for particular options. The relationship between access options, option preferences and goal-attainment strategies is shown in Table 1. This cross-tabulates three categories of option preference against two categories of access option. With regard to option preference, learners might prefer the OLA option, prefer an option other than this or be ambivalent about their mode or institution of study. With regard to access options, learners either had multiple options or were limited to OLA.

In the grid, each combination of option preference and access option is linked with a particular goal-attainment strategy or strategies. The exception to this is the cell created conceptually when learners with multiple options did not prefer to study with OLA. As might be expected, this was an empty cell in this sample of OLA registrants and it is assumed that potential students in this situation rejected this option (that is, applied the **reject OLA** strategy).

For learners with no other means of studying at university level (OLA only), those who favoured this mode saw it as a golden opportunity and adopted a strategy of **making hay** while the sun shines. Those for whom the OLA option was not the mode of first preference either accepted it as the only pathway to their goals, a strategy of **making do** which involved accepting second best or adopted a strategy designed to increase the options in their decision-making space. This **stepping stone** strategy entailed using the credit gained through OLA to gain admission to the course, institution or mode of first choice. Essentially, the aim was to increase learners' latitude for control over access to other courses.

Table 1

Learners' goal-attainment strategies in relation to their access options and preferences.

OPTION PREFERENCE	ACCESS OPTIONS	
	OLA only	Multiple options
OLA preferred	Making hay	Choose OLA Support OLA
Ambivalent/ undecided	Trialing	Trialing
OLA not preferred	Stepping stone Making do	Reject OLA

Learners with multiple options for university access were either exercising their control and freedom of consumer choice (the **choose OLA** strategy), **trialing** open learning or intentionally supporting it (the **support OLA** strategy). Those unsure of their learning preference or their ability to cope with university study took on the OLA option as a trial of the mode's suitability for their needs and could be testing primarily the mode or themselves. The trialing strategy was sometimes used in combination with other strategies and any strategy might be followed on a tentative basis conditional upon the developing curriculum, unfolding experience and reassessment of the learners' goals. Studying through OLA was, thus, a behaviour underpinned by a variety of plans and intentions. Selected examples representing all learners' comments are collated in Table 2.

Table 2

Learner comments typical of goal-attainment strategies

STRATEGY	**LEARNER COMMENT**
Making hay	I am not able to attend on-campus or residential schools because my mother lives with us. Open Learning was just what I needed. I was so eager to start, I cut the ads out of the newspaper and pinned them to my wall.
Trialling	It also gives me an opportunity where I don't have to spend a lot of money or commit myself to see whether I'm able to do some kind of education again. After this year I will know if it suits me.
Making do	It was the only way out at the time. Like I said, I'm fifty four already and I didn't want to waste any more time. I want to do sociology... Not with Open Learning. This was the closest thing to it...
Stepping stone	I intend using Open Learning as a stepping stone by sending the results of one or two semesters to the university with my application for admission and some supporting documentation for special consideration, to demonstrate that I have ample intelligence to complete my chosen degree.
Select OLA	It depends what subjects are available in the future and, you know, what I ultimately decide to do but, you know, certainly I'm quite happy with the Open Learning idea and would like to continue using it.
Support OLA	I thought, seeing it was there, I would patronise it. It's a good thing for the community generally.

6.4.7 Learner control over entry

Since the access sub-frame did not stipulate any entry prerequisites for units offered by OLA, it was the students who took the decision to enter the program on the basis of their own assessment of the suitability of the course for their particular purposes and the alternative options available to them. The locus of control of the decision to register, as well as responsibility for that decision, seems to be vested in the learner. Even learners lacking other options for study had the choice not to study at all although this could mean abandonment of their life project.

Because of this, it might be argued that access (or entry) was under the learners' control and a matter of their own choice and responsibility. If the decision were to prove inappropriate, then it would be the learner's responsibility. The adage, 'buyer beware', although somewhat out of place in an educational context, expresses this perspective and is appropriate to the user-pays, economic rationalist nature of the OLI.

In general, learners indicated that they did accept responsibility for their entry decisions as the following reflection by a learner who did not complete his chosen unit illustrates:

> I am disappointed and even though I think there was very little support, let's not blame other people. The fault was mine - moving house and I have a very demanding job.

However, in some circumstances, learners did not accept full responsibility for inappropriate entry decisions. Learners who thought they had not been made cognisant of adequate information on which to base their decisions did not necessarily do so and, instead, attributed at least part of the responsibility for unsatisfactory decisions to providers. For example, one student stated:

> It's not all me. I think the Open Learning people should make it quite clear to people who haven't done mathematics - because I haven't since I was sixteen and I'm a grandmother - that they will find severe difficulty.

Although failure to accept responsibility for entry was evident in only a small number of cases, the data imply that an open admissions policy, alone, may be insufficient to transfer a perception of control over admission to learners in all cases. It seems that unless learners' decision-making space is adequately described and known to them, transfer of control may be more apparent than real. While the extent to which learners actively searched out and made use of curriculum information lay beyond the curriculum-structures frame, the availability of such information lay within it.

The data imply that for successful transfer of the locus of control over entry to occur, ready access to relevant knowledge on curriculum-structures frames and guidance on its likely interaction with aspects of the learner frame would need to be both the learners' right and the providers' responsibility. Ready access implies that information be accessible without extensive searching on the part of learners and without excessive delays. It also implies the information be provided prior to taking the entry decision. This was not the case on a number of important issues at the time of the study.

6.4.8 Information needed to detail entry decision-making space

Learners indicated a need for the following information on curriculum-structures frames in making their entry decisions:

- **degree pathways** and **credit articulation**,

- **course descriptions** including details of content, assessment and teaching rationale,

- the difficulty levels of units, **standards expected** or the time commitments needed for someone of their particular level of prior background knowledge,

- all **financial costs** including costs of additional support services such as tutorials, phone and library access, and examination invigilation for each unit on offer,

- the **support services** available in connection with each unit offered by participating universities (e.g. phone access, contacts with other learners, availability of past papers and so on),

- their **entitlements and responsibilities** as learners and the conditions of purchase accompanying all units on offer (e.g. extension, deferment, refund and appeal policies; administrative requirements and **service quality commitments** on the part of the provider such as assignment turn around times), and

- the **language and culture** of university education (learners may be unfamiliar with terms and functions of tutors, lecturers, extensions etc.).

During the inaugural study period, learners encountered serious gaps in fulfilling these needs. Among the unknown were the costs of support services accompanying different units, details of degree structures, future offerings, policies on deferral and credit transfer, and explanations of terms common in university vernacular and culture. The handbook for this first study session was a glossy and expensive affair (Moodie, 24.5.93, pers. com.), of possibly great marketing value, but deficient in substance towards detailing the entry decision-making space. Counsellors were available for guidance but, on many issues, the problem was a policy vacuum and dearth of information to impart. The relevant decision-making spaces were, at this stage, uncharted. As an example, there was little credit transfer information in place at this stage and few details of future unit offerings.

In other instances, the problem was one of omission in that established policy was not made readily available at the appropriate time. Here, the relevant frames were in existence but missing from the learners' information pool. One omission with which a number of students took umbrage was the failure to publicise the costs of tutorial services for different units. One student felt strongly enough to say:

> I feel ripped off. I really think I should have known before I started because then that would be part of it.

While the difficulties in collating this information are recognised, the situation remained unchanged after the information became available to central management and remains so at the time of writing (e.g. OLAA, 1995a:7).

The failure to provide detailed and accurate information either influenced learners' perceived control over entry or impacted on learners' experiences, generating knowledge and perceptions of the quality of the program which, in some cases, affected persistence decisions adversely.

Access to information pertinent to learners' entry decisions was more than a 'learner need' in the context of this study. The qualitative data indicate that ready access to significant information on curriculum structures can be a precondition for control and responsibility for entry decisions to be successfully assumed by learners. Where learners considered their right to information from providers, avoidably unsatisfied, they attributed part of the responsibility for unsatisfactory decisions to the provider and held feelings of recrimination.

In implementing their decisions to study through OLA, students needed to manage the undertaking. This involved study management decision-making.

6.5 Study management decision-making

Study management refers to the way in which study was organised and conducted once entry decisions were taken. This was also a consideration before entry but came into effect as the program began.

Learners' study management decision-making differed from providers' curriculum decision-making in a way which was eminently sensible but which had been unanticipated. Learners' decision-making, in this area, was generally **reactive** rather than proactive. This became apparent at the initial interview, when learners were asked how they liked to learn and how they planned to study. At that time, in the second or third week of the study period, many learners had yet to receive their materials from the universities and so had only received the limited, study guidance available from the handbook unless they had sought additional advice from texts on study skills or from friends.

In this situation, which was a problem in itself, learners had no clear idea of what was expected or how they would tackle it. Until they were informed about the content, assessment details and requirements of the unit, their knowledge was inadequate as a base from which to generate specific study plans. Their initial planning was limited to arrangements for watching and/or taping the broadcasts and scheduling time for study. Providers presumably have a detailed knowledge of the learning objectives and content they intend to teach, knowledge of pedagogical theory and techniques, and some knowledge of the learners' context and prior levels of achievement in order to guide curriculum development.

Learners, on the other hand, usually do not know the details of 'what' they are about to learn or 'how' they will be assessed and, as a consequence, cannot anticipate their means of learning it, beyond reliance upon methods that have been successful for them in the past and a strategy of **crossing bridges as you come to them**.

Learners could develop more specific ways of proceeding once the course material had been received and scanned. As the study period progressed, learners were again asked about their study program, how they were using the resources supplied and how they were preparing for examinations and doing assignments. Managing their study and developing a study pattern was often a **problem-solving process** involving some forward planning and a measure of tackling issues as they arose.

Individual learners were virtually powerless to control curriculum offerings and credit articulation policies and had to tailor their goal-attainment strategies around the courses and curriculum on offer. For accredited work, learners had only the latitude allowed by the universities on curriculum content, assessment and assessment timing. For their own purposes, on the other hand, they were able to adjust content to their own interests. This included exploring additional topics but extended to a deliberate strategy of giving assessors the version perceived to be required while refusing to accept this knowledge as personal understanding. In these ways, it was possible for learners to retain control of the specific content learned.

All learners in the sample initially intended to undertake the assessment. The option of studying without undertaking assessment had not been publicised in 1993 as it had been in the TVOLP trial and learners, including those studying entirely for their own interest rather than for credit, were unaware that they could have purchased the study materials without registering for the course. Accordingly, learners were attempting to satisfy assessment standards determined by the curriculum-structures frame. To do this, course completion in the usual manner was necessary as an intention of offering challenge examinations to assess and accredit prior learning (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993 schedule 1:3) had not been implemented and learners were largely unaware of this as a potential option.

In managing their study, learners most commonly recognised a degree of control over the **time** and **place** at which they undertook their study and over the **level of effort** they applied. Some were also aware that they controlled aspects of '**how**' they studied, referring to deliberate modifications or rejection of the university's recommended study plan and adjustment of their own learning styles as appropriate, something which students in other university modes are also free to do. Learners' perceptions of controlling the location in which they studied were maintained with ongoing experience of the program and the convenience of this was appreciated. They could not, however, entirely control the location at which assessment took place as policy stipulated that students within two hours travel of an examination centre must attend at that centre.

Study time management (an aspect of 'when'), and the process of studying itself (relating mostly to 'how'), were decision areas over which learners perceived significant control and these need to be discussed in greater detail.

6.5.1 Time management

In organising their study timing, learners accessed information in all sub-frames of the learner and the curriculum-structures frames. It is easy to imagine how context, attributes of the learner-self and course details would influence timing decisions. Learners reported accessing knowledge in the self sub-frame on their individual learning preferences, strengths and weaknesses; knowledge in the context sub-frame on the times and options available to each individual as well as the advice of friends; in the course specifications sub-frame on assessment deadlines and broadcast schedules and in the nature of teaching and learning sub-frame on time management advice and learning support. Learners' goals and the access policies of institutions also influenced how much time learners chose to devote to their studies and the quality of service they received affected the amount of time needed in response.

Certain aspects of time management were outside the control of learners. These were stipulated as part of the curriculum-structures frame as they are in on-campus higher education.

Providers determined:

- the number, length and scheduling of study periods each year,
- registration closure dates,
- broadcast times,
- assignment deadlines,
- examination dates, and
- the time for degree completion.

Other aspects of time management were at the learners' discretion, within the bounds of the specifications above. Learners could decide, for example:

- 'when' to do 'what' unit (except where prescribed),
- the number of study periods worked each year (pacing),
- the timing of personal study, including viewing times if the broadcasts were recorded, but within the limits set by assessment.

The television components of first year units were offered at multiple time slots which allowed learners a measure of control over viewing times and the option of repeated viewing. Since most learners video-taped the shows, this allowed them added discretion over viewing times and viewing repeats.

Within the time framing of assessment deadlines, broadcast schedules and course calendars, ultimate responsibility for decisions on time management lay with learners. Guidelines on time management for personal study were provided by OLA and learners, particularly novice learners, relied on this advice in planning their initial study schedules. In learners' experience, however, the adequacy of these recommended time commitments was highly variable. Students like Mavis, who had a wealth of prior knowledge, needed to spend very little time to cope with set work. Others, without a background in the subject or who had had a long break from study, like Beth, found they needed to allow more than double the recommended time which meant working around twenty hours per week on each unit. Learners in this situation considered they had been misguided on time allocation and suggested that stronger cautions should be given for learners with no prior knowledge of the subject area.

Curiously, the teaching strategy of pacing study through regularly required assignments induced opposing responses from learners. Pacing is meant to improve course completion rates by controlling personal study through regular assessment tasks (e.g. Daniel and Marquis, 1983:345). While some learners studied well under this system because it was demanded, others found the constant, high workload threatening and demotivating and did not complete it. This suggests that the efficacy of learners' decision-making on subject selection might be improved if providers were to elaborate their teaching rationale for each unit as part of the course description. Alternatively, students could be offered the option of pacing through learning contracts.

Open Learning made possible two strategies involving time which would not be possible with print-based, distance programs. These strategies were only possible with units which had a broadcast component. The **head start** strategy was a learning strategy while the **pre-view** strategy was an aid to unit choice. Both involved viewing or listening to programs without registering for them. When intended as a deliberate learning strategy, learners were attempting to gain time and build introductory knowledge to give themselves a head start in the subject. The same behaviour as part of the pre-view strategy was used to gain knowledge as a basis for subject selection rather than to assimilate content.

Learners time plans for undertaking their weekly and daily work were also varied. Three different approaches were identified. In the first, learners adopted a

regimented approach and set aside certain regular times for study. A second involved planning to 'grab whatever time was available' in the **nibble approach** suggested to them by one provider. A third approach was to plan to do the work when they were feeling motivated, an **inspired approach**.

With respect to plans to study content, some learners adopted an **assignment focus**, beginning on assignment work straight away and deciding to tackle the weekly work as second priority. Others intended to keep up to date with both assignment and recommended work in a **homework-style focus** to avoid a rush at the end. Others again tended to **binge** on a particular topic. For those who had not kept up, this had the character of a last minute dash to complete set work by the required deadline but, for learners like Bruce, it was something of a "learning feast", a preference for working to saturation in one area to the exclusion of other activities.

6.5.2 Learning process management

Clearly, learners saw themselves as actively selecting an instructional situation in order to reach their goals. They had chosen to be dependent and to submit to a learning program in which providers retained ownership of curriculum content and the assessment. Learners accepted and respected the rights and responsibilities of providers in offering courses and expected the university to exercise control over frame features such as content, teaching method and assessment by designing effective, staged courses, and determining 'what' knowledge and competencies were to be targeted for credit and credentialling.

In general, the advice and structure of the guides were genuinely valued as learners attempted to adjust to what was often a very new learning experience. A common study strategy was for learners to **attempt to follow the guides** as best they could. But this was not the only strategy used as observations about time management might lead us to expect. Alternatively, learners adopted a **minimalist approach** to following the guide, taking short cuts, or else followed an **individual method** of their own.

Although the minimalist approach was sometimes later regretted, the success of other individual methods indicates that rigid prescription of a single method may not suit all students. The fact that some learners exercised their own discretion over whether or not to accept the structure and advice of the guides suggests this is a frame over which learners could take the initiative.

The present study could only glimpse the intricacies of how students used the materials and guides supplied. Further studies of the strategies learners employed with particular learning materials would be valuable as a means of enhancing teaching and facilitating learning. As a result of such work, learners could be introduced to a range of alternatives rather than a single, prescribed approach so that they might more easily tailor methods to their individual needs. As the teaching methods employed in distance education are usually highly controlled and directed by the institution (Chesterton, 1985) such research might facilitate greater learner control over study methods.

One generalisation that can be made is that learners' reliance on the television programs as a source of instruction usually weakened as a result of their experience. Initially, the broadcasts were given a prominent place in study planning but as the study period progressed, most students, but by no means all, came to realise that they could learn without them.

In **problem situations** affecting learning, students adopted a variety of strategies in an attempt to keep their plans on track and control outcomes. The decision-space pertinent to problem situations was a complex of all identified frames and sub-frames including perceived quality. In problems linked to quality, learners indicated they believed they were entitled to better treatment or service than they had actually received.

The ultimate decision taken in problem situations was one of discontinuing study through OLA but learners also recognised that they had control options which could be directed towards correcting, circumventing, coping with, or ameliorating the effects of problematic situations and frames. They, thus, acknowledged a degree of control over their responses to the contextual and curricular difficulties they faced. They could apply additional effort, rationalise or re-prioritise their commitments, reorganise their time, seek help, make do, ignore the problem or self-advocate as they saw fit.

In some cases, learners' strategies for problem resolution did not involve providers. In others, learners sought some action or decision controlled as part of the curriculum-structures frame. In instances of the latter type, learners perceived the success of their strategies to be under providers' control. Only rarely did they attempt to take the initiative and usurp providers' control as in the case of the student who informed the university she was taking an extension. But, even in this case, the final decision lay with the university.

By controlling their own responses, learners attempted to influence self, context and curriculum frames which were malleable to varying degrees. The curriculum-structures frame was, generally, only malleable to an extent determined by providers and specified in itself in policies on student entitlements and student support. Students could advocate on their own behalf or seek legal redress in cases where they perceived their entitlements had been infringed, as one student who had not received his materials in time in two successive study periods was considering. However, they had virtually no direct control over curriculum structures.

The nature of problems arising from curriculum structures is discussed more fully with reference to learners' persistence with OLA.

6.6 Learners' persistence decision-making

Learners decided about continuing their studies with OLA on the basis of their experiences of the program, any changes in their circumstances or known options and on the basis of their updated plans regarding their life projects. In order to understand the personal significance of learners' persistence decisions, each case was examined individually for any changes in plans over the duration of the study and the reasons for this. To this end, learners' persistence decisions were explored by tracing learners' original intentions, their subsequent persistence in the program, their intentions regarding future study and their rationales for their persistence behaviour.

6.6.1 Stability of hierarchical goals and strategies

The aggregated data do nothing to dent the record of persistence in non-interactive open learning and distance education programs which is notoriously high. 'Drop-out' rates of around fifty percent are common (Bååth, 1984). Of the forty-four people initially interviewed, one opted to discontinue participation in the research project and so her persistence with OLA is unknown. Of the remaining forty-three, just sixteen were studying through OLA at the time of the final interview midway into the second study period.

This figure is not a good indicator of persistence, however, as not all those no longer studying with OLA planned a permanent departure from it and not all those still studying planned to continue this way. Learners' intentions included re-registration by some of those no longer studying and withdrawal by some who were.

Closer analysis of learners' intentions over the five month observation period revealed a high degree of stability of commitment to their life projects, a lower, but nevertheless substantial, level of stability in their commitment to their long term, academic goals and a lesser stability of commitment to immediate, short-term academic goals. In other words, while learners, generally, remained committed to their overall life projects within this time frame, they displayed considerable flexibility in the strategies and plans they might employ to bring these to fruition. The aggregate data upon which this conclusion is based are presented in Table 3. This records the numbers of students who retained and changed their goals at each level of the three-tier hierarchy (life project, long-term academic goals and short-term academic goals). It also records the number undecided.

Table 3

Stability of learners' hierarchical goals

GOAL HIERARCHY	GOAL STABILITY (n=43)		
	Retained	**Changed**	**Undecided**
Life project	39	4	0
Long-term academic	36	6	1
Short-term academic	26	13	4

This differential stability of commitment to goals across the hierarchy demonstrates the central status of learners' life projects in their curriculum decision-making and reflects the subservience of minor goals to the overarching project. A shift in higher level goals implied a more radical change in intention for learners. Changes of life project generally precipitated changes in subsidiary goals lower on the hierarchy and resulted in changes in strategy often accompanied by a lack of persistence with OLA. Changes in lower level goals, however, did not necessarily imply changes in overall purpose.

In some cases, Open Learning units had been undertaken as a trial, without a firm commitment to a life project or strategies to attain it. In these cases, if a decision on the future planned course of action had been taken by the time of the final interview, this was considered as a 'firming up' or development of the original plan rather than a change of intention. Outcomes of trials and other firming up decisions included both continuing and discontinuing study with OLA. In the case of learners employing a stepping stone strategy, transfer to another institution had been the original intention and was associated with goals and strategies which were entirely stable.

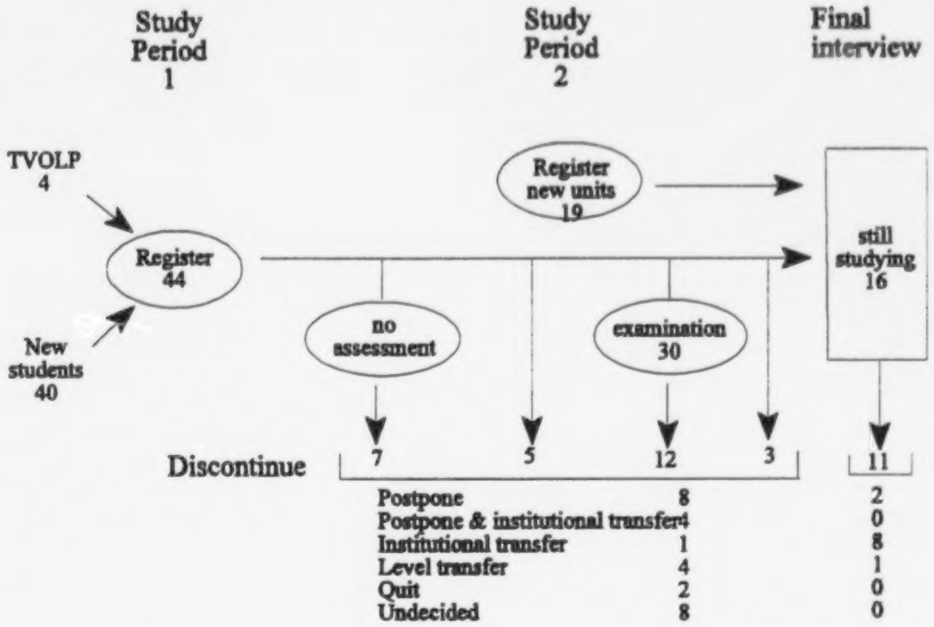
Learners made different kinds of discontinuation decisions according to their differing intentions regarding future educational engagement. **Postponement decisions** represented a temporary withdrawal from study through OLA. In these, the intention was to resume study, by this means, at a later date. Permanent withdrawal from OLA involved either a **quitting decision** in which formal education was to be abandoned altogether, at least for the foreseeable future, or a **transfer decision** in which the intention was to change to another course. Transfer decisions involved opting for either an alternative university's provision, that is, an **institutional transfer decision**, or a different level of educational provision, a **level transfer decision**.

The persistence decisions and intentions of learners in the sample are traced in Figure 5 which, in effect, summarises what might be thought of as the persistence trajectory of each learner. The timing of discontinuation in relation to assessment completion is also shown. The figure records a continuous trickle of learners leaving the program throughout the study. Four students were continuing their studies from the TVOLP.

The number of learners implementing or planning to implement transfer decisions was high. This meant that a significant proportion of the sample had left or planned to abandon study through OLA, on a permanent basis, before attaining their long-term academic goals. Most of these planned institutional transfers while a lesser number sought a different level of educational provision. Level transfers reflected a conclusion that university study exceeded the student's current capabilities or needs. Institutional transfers were planned when the OLA option was not considered the most efficacious or preferable way of realising their aims.

Figure 5

Aggregated data on planned persistence and its timing



The number of learners seeking postponement was also high and others remained undecided about their future plans. There was, thus, considerable movement into and out of the program. Learners were apparently exercising their options for time flexibility to a considerable extent and this points to the value of timing control to learners. Since OLA offered four study periods each year, it was possible either to 'fast track' to a degree by registering for most sessions or to maintain an acceptable minimum rate of part-time progress without studying in every session. Many learners valued a break from study. On the other hand, several were keen to progress as quickly as possible. One student seemed well placed to complete the requirements for a degree within two and a half years.

6.6.2 Continuation as strategic action

Goal attainment prior to course completion (Bååth, 1984) and dismissal by the university (Peters, O., 1992) have been identified as reasons for a lack of persistence in other distance programs. These were not tenable explanations of discontinuation in this study. Many learners discontinued their studies with OLA without having fully attained their academic goals and dismissal by the university did not occur in any of the cases studied. There was, in fact, no policy of exclusion on the basis of failure.

In most cases, discontinuation had the character of a strategic act being either:

- a deliberate strategy from the outset in the case of learners employing a stepping stone strategy,
- a strategic decision about the timing of study in the case of a postponement,
- a strategic change in goal-attainment strategy, or
- associated with a change in higher order goals.

In deciding whether or not to continue using the OLA option, learners' revisited curriculum decisions encountered at entry with a more detailed knowledge of their curriculum decision-making space as a result of their experience. Their experiences of the program were both positive and negative. Whereas positive ones encouraged learners to continue both with the OLA option, and with providers with whom they had developed a comfortable familiarity in particular, negative ones were implicated in discontinuation decisions.

On the positive side, learners considered the study materials, broadcasts and study guides to be excellent supports for their learning experiences. The teaching support with some providers and some units far exceeded expectation. Practices found to be particularly valuable included detailed comment and feedback on their work - as opposed to a mark, newsletters which allowed them to see their own problems in relation to those of the cohort (e.g. common errors on an assignment and their solutions), and quick, sympathetic responsiveness to their needs.

Although some experiences were excellent, students found the administrative and teaching support and the quality of service variable. This took its toll on persistence but was not the only contributing factor.

6.6.3 Learners' rationales for their lack of persistence

Learners gave a broad range of reasons for discontinuing their Open Learning studies. It is noteworthy that 'shortage of time' was not prominent amongst them. This reason, as Garland (1993) discovered, can be a face-saving explanation covering less culturally acceptable but more significant reasons. The broad range and nature of reasons given by learners in this study suggests they were open in their responses because of the rapport established in previous interviews.

Although discontinuation decisions resulted from an interaction of learner and curriculum frames, reasons centreing on both the learner frame and on curriculum structures were implicated. The specific sub-frames involved were similar to those accessed during entry decision-making with the addition of the sub-frame of perceived quality. This also influenced study management decision-making through its contribution to problem situations.

Juran and Gyrna (1988) define quality in terms of meeting customers' needs. If this commercial conception were adopted, reasons for discontinuation stemming from curriculum structures would need to be counted as quality issues. Such a broad approach to quality would probably contribute to program improvement. However, it was not the conception learners applied to their experiences. By contrast, learners appeared to judge quality according to their expectations and previous experiences. Although they were frustrated by curriculum limitations, and worried about credit issues and the future expansion of the program, they nevertheless accepted these limitations of the curriculum as part of the reality upon which they had based their decision to study this way. They expected no more. Only when learners indicated they felt entitled to better than they had actually received, was an issue of quality identified.

Reasons for discontinuing relating to the learner frame included:

- attributes of the **learner-self** such as attitudes, competence or motivation which prompted a decision of the order of: 'I am not at this time suited to studying at university level by Open Learning', and

- the nature of the learners' environment or **context** which made it difficult to undertake the work.

Reasons relating to curriculum structures centred on:

- learners rights and responsibilities within the **course specification**, **access** and **nature of teaching and learning** sub-frames. These prompted a decision equivalent to 'Open Learning is not the way I intend to meet my learning needs in the long term', and

- learners' perceptions of the **quality** of their Open Learning experience as compared with their expectations of service quality.

Each of these is elaborated in the following section as a lens into learners' experiences.

6.6.4 Learner frame related reasons for discontinuation

Learner-self related reasons for not persisting with the OLA option involved learners' competencies and attributes, for example, academic competence, prior knowledge and learning skills. Significant amongst the latter were students' perceptions of their goal-commitment, motivation, organisational abilities and self-discipline regarding study. Contextual reasons included the learner's health, financial situation and the demands of work and family such as illness of a family member or the need to travel and be away from home. It included external events beyond the learner's control.

6.6.5 Curriculum-structures frame related reasons for discontinuation

While it was the case that Open Learning suited some learners "down to the ground", others expressed a strong sense of dissatisfaction with its curriculum structure and service quality and indicated that these were important components of their decision to discontinue. Both the self-study mode, in general, and the curriculum structures of the OLI, in particular, influenced decisions to discontinue.

With respect to self-study, some students decided to discontinue because Open Learning required them to "teach", motivate and organise themselves, tasks which they found difficult in the context of the support provided for their units. Curriculum structures peculiar to Open Learning which influenced persistence adversely included the:

- limited range of units and degrees on offer at the time,
- perceived status and credit standing of its units,
- limited or costly support available with particular units,
- concurrence of examination and study periods,
- prolonged delays between unit completion and examinations in some units at some times, and
- administrative requirements such as organising examination invigilation within frames set by OLA.

Where the curriculum content on offer did not match well with learners' academic goals, a powerful reason for discontinuing was generated and learners sought transfer to more appropriate courses. This was particularly true where learners sought a specialist, vocational credential since only generalist degrees were available through OLA. Learners in this first study period were also concerned that it was not always possible to map out a degree sequence using OLA units. Much policy on future curriculum offerings and credit transfer was yet to be formulated. This problem was particularly acute for learners who had started with the TVOLP and were already studying at second level.

The policy vacuum on credit transfer inhibited student persistence with the OLA option. Learners' efforts to plan a program of study were frustrated by this lack of policy and universities' responses to their enquiries did not encourage risk-taking in this regard. Even when transfer to other courses provided by universities participating in the OLI was sought, there were problems with incompatible credit point systems and unmapped specifics of which units would receive 'how much' credit towards specific degrees. Mavis' experience is typical of the difficulties encountered.

Learners' perceptions of the status of degrees by Open Learning were variable. Whereas one participant had chosen Open Learning for the perceived higher status of a degree from a particular provider, others were influenced to discontinue because they perceived Open Learning to be less highly regarded by employers and other universities to which they might transfer.

The support accompanying each unit was a matter for the providing university or faculty and, as a consequence, varied greatly from unit to unit. In some units, learners were impressed and encouraged to continue by the support they received. In others, the reverse perception triggered discontinuation. In the latter case, learners concluded that the universities were providing a credentialling, rather than a teaching and learning service, merely rubber-stamping their work and taking their dollars but providing minimal support.

For other learners, the flexibility provided by OLA in offering four study periods a year became a barrier to persistence. This timing structure meant that the units of successive study periods followed on without a break for the examination of previous units. Examinations and new content delivery occurred concurrently. This either meant a very high work load during this time or it meant postponing the new work and having to catch up at a later date. It also meant that examination results were not available when decisions about registration for the subsequent study period had to be taken.

Some learners deliberately postponed re-registration to have feedback on their progress before a decision on persistence was made. One student inadvertently, and incorrectly, assumed re-registration would follow the examination and excluded herself from the next study period by missing the closing date. For another, trying to cope with examinations and catching up with new work missed, became more than she could manage.

In some study periods in some units, students foresaw difficulties in the long delay (up to 3 months) between ending the unit and sitting for the examination. In addition, the openness of being able to study from anywhere in Australia was also sometimes associated with administrative responsibilities and costs which some learners found difficult to accept and to implement. These requirements influenced decisions to discontinue.

One student, for example, was not prepared to pay the $50 fee and organise her own examination invigilation. She knew no-one personally who fitted OLA's criteria for supervisors and was reticent to ask a stranger when all she could tell them was that they would be required for an hour and a half at an, as yet, unspecified time within a known three week period, some three months hence. It also needs to be asked whether imposing such a fee was consistent with the obligation to provide "all the learning materials, services and experiences necessary to complete all the requirements of each unit of study for the basic charge" as specified in the contract with the Commonwealth (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993, Schedule 1:3).

Charges for additional support services also militated against persisting. Learners made comparisons on fee-for-service with on-campus and distance education modes in which students were not charged for tutorials or access to teaching staff and where a wider range of services such as health and personal counselling are obtained for the equivalent HECS payment. On the positive side of cost considerations, Open Learners appreciated that they had less expenditure on travel, photocopying and babysitting and no student union fees.

Some learners sought to transfer from OLA to distance education to streamline administrative interactions to one provider or avoid conflict on matters such as library borrowing from one university for the units offered by another.

6.6.6 Perceived quality as a reason for discontinuing

Reasons of quality contributing to discontinuation decisions covered a number of different curriculum service areas including materials delivery, administration, communication, assessment feedback and advisory services. The late delivery of materials such as handbooks, cover sheets, assignments, library vouchers, or even their failure to arrive at all, contributed to unfavourable perceptions of the quality of the learning experience. Such lateness triggered postponement or added to pressures to transfer or quit.

Misinformation, or the quality of advice received, was the direct cause for discontinuing, rather than merely a reason, in two cases. These learners were given incorrect or incomplete information, by either the providing university or OLA (and it is not sure which) about their rights of deferral. As a result, their intentions to defer, that is to postpone without total loss of the fee paid, became decisions to quit. Others were not reminded of their options to defer when discussing their persistence intentions with authorities. However, the fee for deferral required by some providers limited the attractiveness of this option.

Perceived administrative inefficiencies and difficulties in making contact also discouraged persistence. Students encountered problems with their registration as Mavis had done. They also experienced phone lines which were perpetually engaged, answering machines, slow responses and unanswered messages despite persistent effort on their part to make contact. Slow assessment feedback was particularly disturbing and this could well have influenced students' achievement because a number of learners went to their final examinations without any feedback whatsoever on earlier assignments.

Perceptions of poor quality did not always trigger discontinuation. Some of the students who persisted with the OLA option displayed considerable tolerance for practices they would have preferred to be different. These learners tended to accept perceived quality breaches as the "hiccoughs" of a new venture or else were prepared to tolerate these conditions because they had few options or because complaining or worrying would cost them money, time and emotional energy which they could ill afford.

6.6.7 The nature and timing of discontinuation decisions

The reasons learners gave for their actual or intended lack of persistence were related to both the kinds of persistence decision intended and the time frame in which those decisions were to be implemented. This is supported by the data in Table 4 which reports the numbers of students giving reasons of different kinds for their discontinuation decisions. While the numbers in each group were small, indicating caution as to the generalisability of findings, several apparently logical patterns of association are evident. Individual learners could make more than one kind of persistence decision which they planned to implement at different times. For example, they might postpone and then transfer. In addition, learners could give more than one reason for their decisions. For these reasons, the numbers in each column are not summative.

Postponement commonly originated in the learner frame and was associated with contextual circumstances and personal difficulties. Institutional transfer decisions, on

Table 4

Numbers of students giving different kinds of reasons for their discontinuation decisions

REASON	KIND OF DISCONTINUATION DECISION				
	Quit (n = 2)	**Institutional transfer** (n = 13)	**Level transfer** (n = 5)	**Postpone** (n = 14)	**Not decided** (n = 8)
Learner self	2	1	5	5	2
Context	1	1	1	10	4
Curriculum structures	2	11	2	2	3
Quality	1	2	1	0	2

the other hand, were triggered primarily from the curriculum-structures frame. It seems that learners who planned institutional transfers generally did so because they perceived the curriculum of Open Learning did not best meet their needs. All students intending to change to a different level of educational provision had concerns about aspects of the learner-self sub-frame as well as a range of additional issues. Those who planned to quit formal study altogether and those who were unsure about their future plans gave a variety of explanations across all four categories of reason.

There was also a relationship between the intended timing of implementing a decision to discontinue and the reason given. Learners who had already permanently abandoned study through OLA were influenced by a wide variety of reasons. However, those who planned to discontinue at some time in the future were responding to the available curriculum and almost invariably planned to transfer to other university provision. It may be that early discontinuation was associated with initial reassessment of the efficacy of this strategy while planned future withdrawal was linked to the stepping stone strategy.

6.6.8 Learner control over persistence

In all but exceptional circumstances, learners perceived persistence to be under their control and executed this decision as a matter of strategic intention. Even in cases where frames, such as context, cost or quality, militated strongly against continuing, learners took responsibility for their decisions to leave the program. An exception in which discontinuation was outside of the learner's control involved the context sub-frame. The reregistration of the learner in prison was prevented by inefficient handling of the application by jail administration authorities.

While learners controlled persistence decisions, these could be triggered by any of the reasons already discussed. The actual decision taken, in any particular case, depended on the perceived inter-relationships of reasons pressuring the student to leave and other decision frames. This finding concurs with theories suggesting that persistence is dependent on an interaction between the student and the institution attended (e.g. Tinto, 1982).

The personal qualities of learners and their willingness and capacity to cope and persist in problem situations influenced their decisions and, for this reason, attributions as to the precise cause of a lack of persistence could not be made. There was also an intertwining of factors contributing to discontinuation decisions. Nevertheless, the adequacy of curriculum structures and the perceived quality of learners' experiences in the program were strongly implicated.

6.7 Summary and conclusions

The central purpose of this chapter has been to provide the curriculum conception of open learning as a perceived student learning experience. This is to be used to illuminate the extent to which control of curriculum has been transferred to learners. Learner control of entry decision-making, study management and persistence have already been considered in the appropriate sections of the chapter. These three are combined in this summary to form an overall assessment of students' latitude for control.

In making decisions about their study, students found themselves to be, essentially, curriculum-takers in a provider-controlled learning environment rather than curriculum-makers or even curriculum-influencers. But this was no less than they expected. Learners were primarily concerned with controlling the direction of their own lives and were using the option generated by the OLI strategically to achieve their goals. Their need to control curriculum was secondary to these ends.

Apart from open entry and the flexibilities of time and place offered by the distance mode, learners did not expect, and neither did they experience, levels of choice and control much beyond those normally available in higher education. To most, being in control meant deciding to take a course, knowing and accepting the terms and conditions set by providers. After deciding to enter the program, being in control meant managing the assigned learning tasks, taking coping decisions in problem situations and deciding about continuing. Examples of learners taking the initiative over curriculum content, policy application or learning tasks provided the exceptions rather than the rule.

Learners' curriculum decision-making space was a complex defined by frames arising from the learner on the one hand and curriculum structures on the other. Sub-frames within the learner frame related to the learners' goals, context and personal attributes. Sub-frames of the curriculum-structures frame were conceived in terms of access, course specifications, the nature of teaching and learning and perceived quality. The curriculum-structures frame included the wider educational system and was not confined to the policies and structures of Open Learning alone. Together, these frames set the boundaries within which learners made their curriculum decisions according to the limitations of their awareness and perception.

The identification of the learner's context as a significant constraint on their decision-making indicates the need to revise the model of learner control presented earlier (Chapter 2). Thus, learner control is seen to be dependent on learners' rights and responsibilities as determined by curriculum structures, by the resources available to support their learning - and these may derive from personal contexts as well as institutional provision - by learners' own attributes, competencies and commitment, and by constraints imposed by their personal environments.

Learners experienced greatest control over their participation in the program and certain aspects of study management. However, even at these points, curriculum structures were strong frames on learners' decisions. The established curriculum structures flowing from the OLI allowed students the right of entry but, contrary to expectation, open access did not guarantee students control over the entry decision. Learning environments with ready access to curriculum information were needed for learners to perceive and accept full transfer of control over entry from the institution to themselves. Learners considered that providers also had a responsibility to inform them of the details and implications of curriculum structures to guide their decisions and, unless this responsibility was appropriately discharged, successful transfer of control of 'who' would undertake the program was inhibited. In terms of the model of learner control, ready access to course information needs to be a right of students.

For many students, OLA was the only perceived option for university study. This was the case for over half the students interviewed for the study which is noteworthy even though the sample was not selected randomly and did not aim at statistical representativeness of the entire population. The right of access was, thus, an important aspect of learners' experience as it could open options, enlarge decision-making space and facilitate goal attainment. It could be used to achieve learners' goals directly or as a means of gaining access to other options.

Learners adopted a range of strategies to reach their goals and it was not uncommon for them to view the OLA option as a stepping stone to other higher educational provision. However, strategic decision-making and the formulation of detailed plans was frequently frustrated by the immature curriculum available at the time and the policy vacuum on credit recognition towards alternative courses. Limited or untimely access to established policy also frustrated students' decision-making.

Control over persistence was exercised strategically in association with plans for the realisation or modification of learners' goals. At this decision point, learners reassessed their goals and strategies in the light of their experiences and current context of options.

A large proportion of the sample was planning to discontinue study through OLA prior to the achievement of their academic goals or had, in fact, already done so. Reasons for this involved an inter-twining of the learner and curriculum-structures frames but the inadequacy of the curriculum, at the time of the study, for the fulfilment of learners' goals was strongly implicated. In some cases, the specific units and degrees on offer were considered inappropriate to learners' needs and goals. In others, the mode or standard of study was not the preferred or was unsuited to learners' competencies or learning styles.

In a number of cases, the quality of the experienced curriculum was below expectation. This both generated a need for decisions about 'how' to manage the resulting problematic situation and contributed to a lack of persistence. Perceived quality differed from notions of status and referred to how well learners' expectations of service quality were met. Learners held opposing conceptions of the status of Open Learning degrees, some prizing the degree from particular universities, others holding Open Learning degrees in lower regard. They also experienced variable levels of support and reported variable quality. With some units, the support was reportedly excellent and well above expectation. With others, it did not meet the minimum standards specified by curriculum planners. Charges for services designated as non-essential in the OLI also varied from a free service to around $66 per hour for tuition. Thus, while learners initially considered themselves to be undertaking a university program comparable with conventional courses, their experience was in a number of ways, marginalised and below expectation.

In summary, students in the inaugural study period experienced intended curriculum structures which constrained and frustrated their decision-making. They also experienced the consequences of short developmental time frames which meant that the expected quality of their experiences sometimes suffered. Learners encountered an underdeveloped curriculum, underdeveloped credit articulation as well as administrative ineptitude and other incursions of quality. They found dealing with such difficulties a drain on their resources.

Learners perceived their rights and entitlements to universities' teaching services through OLA to be less than comparable with those perceived to pertain to courses funded within the Unified National System of Higher Education. They recognised that, with some units, they were being required to pay for services normally included with conventional courses. The same applies to the perceived quality of learners' experiences of the curriculum. However, learners did not relish the prospect of having to choose their subjects on the basis of quality or value-for-money.

Although the OLI offered students open access, this access was to a different and unequal branch of educational provision. The newness of the Initiative and the difficulties of implementing it in such a short space of time are, perhaps, one explanation of unfavourable aspects of learners' experiences. They cannot, however, entirely account for it because significant aspects of the marginalisation students experienced were intended by curriculum planners, as demonstrated in Chapter 5. Perhaps the most significant of these was the limited service in return for the basic charge.

The openness of the Initiative from students' perspective was linked to the intended and experienced curriculum flowing from the OLI but also to the openness of the entire higher educational system. The achievement of many learners' long-term, academic goals will ultimately be dependent upon curriculum developments, particularly with respect to course expansion through OLA, credit articulation with the Unified National System and quality assurance in terms of the quality of service to students.

Endnotes

1. With Beth's permission, her case was submitted to OLA for review. The researcher was later informed that she would be compensated.

Chapter 7

NEW MEANING FOR OPEN LEARNING

7.1 Introduction

Thus far, three alternative curriculum conceptions of open learning have been developed from corresponding data sets. Theoretical conceptions of open learning were reviewed in Chapter 4, the intended curriculum of the OLI was detailed in Chapter 5, while the experiences of students as decision-makers in the OLI were analysed in Chapter 6. The present task is to examine the congruence of these three conceptions as a basis for developing a new theoretical perspective on open learning.

The initial discussion addresses the 'fit' of existing theoretical conceptions of open learning with the empirical evidence of the case of the OLI as detailed in Chapters 5 and 6. The Initiative is then examined in relation to its socio-cultural and historic context and a new focus for interpretation identified. The status of the Initiative in terms of curriculum code theory is also determined and, from this foundation, an interpretation of the Initiative coherent with the evidence is generated. This interpretation is then extrapolated from the case in point to the open learning phenomenon as a whole in a proposal of new theory about open learning. Historical trends in university development and adult education are included in support of the theory.

The discussion thus moves well beyond the participants' points of view to develop an overall interpretation. In broad terms, the OLI is seen as a technocratic means of opening access and a milestone in an ongoing and widespread process of educational democratisation.

7.2 Congruence of theory, intention and experience in the OLI

A considerable number of alternative theoretical conceptions of open learning were identified in Chapter 4. These offer a wide range of possible explanations of the Australian OLI. In the opening sections of this chapter, the nature of the Initiative is elaborated in terms of these previously identified theoretical conceptions of open learning. The discussion concentrates on conceptions with which the Initiative is most congruent but also discounts prominent alternatives.

7.2.1 A technocratic focus on opening access

In broad terms, the Initiative demonstrated greatest affinity with those descriptive conceptions of open learning which stress access. More specifically, it displayed a technocratic orientation to extending participation in which economic and political intentions were paramount.

The evidence of both student experience and the intended curriculum confirms the **access focus** of the Initiative. With respect to the intended curriculum, opening access was a stated intention from the outset and this was implemented through an open entry policy and the use of distance delivery and teaching methods. The primary aim was to provide a means of increasing participation in higher education and expanding access to degrees. The Initiative was designed as a pragmatic response to unmet demand for university places. This was to be implemented through a substitution effect which recognised the greater appropriateness of Open Learning for experienced, mature-age students rather than novice learners or school leavers.

The over-riding concern was to provide more students access to what was already available in conventional provision. This basically disseminatory, 'more of the same' focus on the **quantity** of provision was evident in the Initiative's intended reliance on existing courses and established providers, the limited funding available for new course development and intentions of parity of academic standards and basic pricing.

Economic concerns were major constraints on the intended curriculum. The funding of the Initiative demanded severe cost efficiencies which were thought by many providers to be unrealistic (Senate Inquiry, 1994:26). The fact that the Commonwealth was prepared to sacrifice the standards of service normally accompanying external courses in pursuit of fee comparability and cost containment demonstrates the dominance of economic intentions over educational ones. It also confirms the technocratic focus of the Initiative and aligns the Initiative with **economically oriented** conceptions of open learning as a cost efficient means of expanding participation.

Students' experiences support this conclusion in several ways but also indicate significant contradictions in the intentions of the Initiative regarding opening access. These contradictions are, themselves, largely explicable in terms of resourcing issues which is further evidence of the economic orientation of the Initiative. The manner in which resourcing issues were resolved again highlights the priority given economic considerations.

On the one hand, student experience confirms the focus on access because many students had no other options for university study. Learners experienced significant control over entry allowing them access to the units of the Initiative. They generally considered themselves to be undertaking a university course comparable to on-campus courses and were relying on this expected comparability in formulating plans to achieve their academic and life goals.

On the other hand, the access afforded learners through the Initiative was limited in a number of important ways. Significantly, the curriculum range of the Initiative was intentionally restricted to generalist courses and areas of high demand. It was also constrained, initially, in practical terms, by short developmental time lines. At the time of the investigation, just two Open Learning degrees were in place. Because of these limitations, the OLA option was regarded as a partial, rather than a complete, means of achieving the academic goals of some students and their plans were contingent upon transfer to conventional provision. However, as articulation of Open Learning courses with those of the Unified National System of Higher Education was under-developed, students encountered difficulties in making this transition. The access made available by the OLI was, thus, limited by the range of units and degrees it offered and the problems of establishing credit transfer. This, combined with variable levels of support for a diverse student population, meant that successful access to completion of appropriate degrees was far from guaranteed. The large number of students who did not plan to persist with the OLA option confirms these limitations on access.

Since the time of data collection (March - August, 1993), the number of units and degrees available through OLA has greatly expanded. By the end of 1994, nine of twenty participating universities offered 'Open Learning' degrees (Pritchard, 10.11.94, pers. com.). Even so, the matter of transfer to conventional provision remained a matter of concern (Senate Inquiry, 1994:54). In 1995, a pilot Australian Credit Transfer Agency administered by the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee and supported by DEET was established to address this and other issues of credit transfer within the Unified National System.

These developments could conceivably increase the perceived efficacy of the OLA option as a means of reaching students' goals. They do not, however, alter the fundamental conclusion that the Initiative is access focussed and economically oriented.

7.2.2 Meeting learners' needs

Other contradictions between the intended curriculum and student experience relate to access and equity. As described in Chapter 5, the Commonwealth Labor government was committed to equity of access. The TVOLP was specifically intended to improve access for rural and isolated students and for those with disabilities. The Initiative also intended to open access at an equitable cost to students. In a way, these intentions suggest congruence with the theoretical conception of open learning as a means of meeting learners' needs. However, there was little to suggest that equity of access or attention to learners' needs were powerful intentions in practice.

The major need addressed by the Initiative appeared to be the need to address unmet demand and increase participation in higher education. Disadvantaged groups received little targeted support beyond the equity advantages normally accompanying the use of distance teaching methods. Exceptions to this were a teletext option for the hearing impaired and the offer of credit for evidence of overcoming disadvantage towards certain Open Learning degrees (Monash University, 1993). While the use of distance methods may facilitate access and equity, this mode of delivery was also important to goals of cost efficiency. The Initiative did not offer students a choice of delivery modes to best suit their needs. On the other hand, the distance teaching technologies and methodologies employed were governed by economic imperatives.

In a number of significant ways, the Initiative did not meet learners' needs. Its place as a partial strategy within learners' nested plans and the number of students planning institutional transfers provide evidence of this. The success of the Initiative in meeting learners' needs must also remain in serious doubt since learners' held variable perceptions of the quality of the program and this had a negative influence on persistence in some cases. A study by J. Walker (1994) also reported that disabled students experienced difficulty in meeting their needs.

In other ways, the Initiative arguably contributed to inequity of access rather than to meeting learners' needs in an equitable fashion. The role of the Initiative in reducing access to on-campus places by mature-age students is one example of this. However, of greater import to the total student population, were its effects of marginalising Open Learning students in an under-resourced and semi-isolated strand of university provision and creating a two-tier system of support. This was based on the ability or willingness of students to pay for services classed as non-essential and on the willingness of providers to offer support on the limited funding available. That the Initiative was under-resourced is evident from the necessity for, or at least, the practice of, charging students for services normally accompanying unit provision, for example, access to academic staff and tutorial assistance. That it was semi-isolated is evident from its place outside of the Unified National System and the limited extent of credit transfer.

These tensions between intention and experience stemmed in large measure from economic frames set by the Commonwealth. Economic constraints were responsible for dissonance between intentions of academic parity and increasing equity, on the one hand, and experiences of inequity and marginalisation on the other. The funding of the Initiative demanded severe cost efficiencies. These were implemented by limiting services to students, by charging fees for support and/or by costing Open Learning at the marginal rate of providing existing courses.

Some universities provided the same service to their Open Learning students as their external ones. In these cases, Open Learning was either run on under-utilised capacity or increased productivity or it was supported by on-campus infrastructure and the funding which supports this. In this way, the level of service was maintained. Universities who treated students in the same way, thus demonstrated the potential for achieving cost efficiencies. Other university providers either reduced their service to Open Learning students and/or charged these students additional fees for 'non-essential' services. In these cases, Open Learning students either received less or paid more than students occupying funded university places and this was, arguably, not equitable.

The concern for equity which had led to the specification of minima for services and maxima for registration fees (to prevent profiteering) did not stretch to funding comparable levels of service. This made intentions of fee comparability and equity more rhetorical than real and again signals the prominence of economic intentions.

The variable quality experienced by students in this study also appears inequitable. It is internally inequitable between units and may be inequitable in comparison with external provision. The study had no direct means of comparing the perceived quality of Open Learning units and their external counterparts. However, in at least one instance, lower quality was reportedly a deliberate stratagem within the context of the resourcing levels of the Initiative (see page 163).

Thus, while equity was a stated intention facilitated by the use of television and other aspects of distance study, it seemed not to have been the primary concern. The Initiative was, therefore, not well characterised in terms of meeting learners' needs except in its responsiveness to demand for access.

7.2.3 Technology

The Initiative is not well characterised by the use of technology, for while television was the starting point for the TVOLP, this was supplanted in the OLI by interest in opening degree access. Furthermore, while television undoubtedly played a role in extending access through the broad reach and public visibility of the ABC and also helped shape the curriculum, the main delivery mode was print. Many units, particularly higher level units, lacked a television component, and television segments, where they were used, conveyed limited content. Many students came to realise that viewing was not essential to their studies. Thus, even though the use of television in the Initiative was distinctive in undergraduate higher education in Australia, conceiving of the Initiative in terms of technology does not reflect its predominant intentions or experience.

The Initiative's strong reliance on print and television is also at odds with the conception of open learning as a third generation, computer-based distance technology. However, the establishment of Open Net and interest in alternative modes of delivery nudges the Initiative further in this direction. In calling for expressions of interest in offering units through OLA, attention was called to the possibility of using alternatives such as video and audio cassettes and computer assisted learning (OLAA, 1993f:3). Even so, economic constraints defined the use of technology.

Thus, in contrast with its ambiguous role in promoting equity, partial success in serving students' needs and limited impetus from technology, the Initiative demonstrated clear responsiveness to economic needs and pressures. Government need to curtail expenditure was just one aspect of this. The Initiative was also responsive to the economic needs of students since demand was heavily constituted of demand for vocational credentials. Fee parity is another example of this.

7.2.4 Curriculum control: Learner choice not empowerment

The pattern of curriculum control displayed by the Initiative is consistent with its interpretation as a technocratic means of opening access. As concluded in Chapter 6, learners were essentially curriculum-takers in a provider-controlled program and, apart from control over entry or access, had levels of control comparable with those which could be expected of the distance mode of conventional programs. This amounted to choices among the units and degrees on offer within the prescriptions set for particular degrees, and control or responsibility for study management within the flexibility framework that is distance provision.

Although learners were using the opportunities provided by Open Learning to control the direction of their lives, the intended curriculum of the Initiative did not extend to learner control of curriculum. Neither did it encompass learner empowerment. The Initiative did not extend learners' control of assessment or curriculum content. On the contrary, there was some closure of assessment options in the interests of parity (see page 155) and some evidence of 'closedness' of content. For instance, C. Perry (1993:64), noted a paternalistic, didactic and disseminatory style in the making of the television series, *Out of Empire*, during the TVOLP. While such an approach is not necessarily typical of all units (e.g. Perry, C., 1993:68), Bååth's (1982) analysis of teaching methods in distance education suggests that a disseminatory approach and provider control of content and process may be difficult to avoid when relying on non-interactive methods.

The extent to which individual units may have attempted to encourage critical thinking and individual meaning making was not examined. Nevertheless, there was no indication that a developmental orientation to opening access was being promoted at the level of intention examined. Teaching style and unit content also received little attention at this level. Curriculum planners responsible for instigating and implementing the OLI appeared to recognise the autonomy of university providers and to focus on academic parity and the use of existing courses.

The degree to which learners perceived control over entry to the OLA option is also taken to support an interpretation in terms of access. This is because the objective in opening entry was to expand participation rather than to facilitate learner empowerment or extend control of curriculum to learners.

7.2.5 Fordism of Open Learning

King (1993a:140, 1993b) has argued that the OLI relies on Fordist principles. This study does not contest King's view because cost efficiencies were sought through economies of scale and the techniques of mass handling and mass production. The study would add, however, that the OLI does this, in a number of important respects, much like a limpet attached to pre-existing production systems rather than through production mechanisms of its own. For example, the OLI relies largely on existing courseware and television material. Its system of delivery (primarily print and television) is also a mass system in which the broadcast component is designed or selected with broad audience appeal in mind. A number of administrative functions, such as handling registration enquiries, are also automated.

While Fordist in these ways, the OLI also allowed learner-centred flexibilities such as the time, place and pace of study through its curriculum policies.

The possibility that open learning is the post-Fordist (or more precisely, neo-Fordist) form of education was largely discredited in Chapter 4 and will not be discussed further except to say that the Fordist tendencies of the OLI also negate this view. On the other hand, the social progressive, post-Fordist conception of open learning seen in developmental and emancipatory conceptions of it (see page 128) has been discussed in the previous section on learner control. It remains to consider whether the OLI is serving in a neo-Fordist way as an ideology of opportunity.

7.2.6 Rhetoric of opportunity

Through the Initiative, the Commonwealth government is seen to be addressing its obligations with respect to higher education. Yet, numbers of students regarded the OLA option as a partial, rather than total, strategy to achieve their goals. Others, again, failed to persist with this option. This conflict between intention and experience suggests that the promise of open learning may have been more apparent than real and indicates that the conception of open learning as an ideology of opportunity may have some merit. This is not to suggest any manner of false representation because students were aware of the nature of the curriculum and uncertainty of transfer from informational materials on the program. However, at a political level, the OLI created an educational infrastructure which seemingly allowed unrestricted access to a university education. As one student noted: "Look, we know there are not enough places in university but now there is Open Learning".

Several students were inspired and excited by the community 'good' they perceived in the establishment of Open Learning and selected this option in order to support it. With this infrastructure in place, opportunities became available for anyone to obtain a university degree. Failure to achieve personal success might then be seen as a matter of individual learner responsibility rather than a matter of inadequate provision or support, or inequity. This would apply particularly in the case of units not accompanied by a strong philosophy of student support.

The extent to which conceptions of open learning as an ideology of opportunity are appropriate to the Initiative would seem to relate to the success and commitment of the program to meeting learners' needs and the extent to which it is hailed as a panacea or solution abrogating the need for further reform or government support by implying that obligations are already being met.

In consideration of this, examination of data on the funding and cost structures of the Initiative reveals the limited extent of the government contribution to the Initiative. While the political and financial commitment of the Commonwealth was, no doubt, critical to its establishment, continuing government resourcing commitment was entirely absent. The cost structures set by the Commonwealth limited the nature of the curriculum and its degree structures. Its entire revenue - except for earnings from overseas students - was to be derived from student fees set at approximately one quarter the total funding of conventional undergraduate courses. The program relied on both the units and degree-granting powers of established providers for economic reasons. The level of funding also limited services and academic support for students. Thus overall, there appears little to indicate a high level of government support for ensuring that the opportunity for expanding access provided by the Initiative did not remain simply an opportunity, unrealisable in practice by many students.

Yet, despite this lack of resourcing commitment, the Initiative seems more a pragmatic response to access demands and economic constraints, than an ideology of opportunity. For, while the rhetoric surrounding the Initiative has focussed on the positive, it does not seem to have portrayed Open Learning as a panacea. Weaknesses of the program have been discussed publicly (e.g. Atkinson et al., 1995:63) and further effort has been applied to improving both support for students and credit transfer through the establishment of Open Net and ACTA respectively. Even though the OLI seems unlikely to challenge the status quo which means it may contribute to perpetuating current practices, its pragmatism is not difficult to detect. On the other hand, there is little clear evidence that it was either intended, or is serving, as a strategy of legitimisation and social control even though such a purpose would, by its very nature, be difficult to detect. On these grounds, the theoretical conception of open learning as an ideology of opportunity is considered to have some worth but to be without pervading force in this case[1].

7.2.7 The best fit

To this point, the existing theoretical conception of open learning most congruent with the OLI is that which interprets it as an educational system designed to expand access for pragmatic reasons. In both its curriculum intentions and students' experience, the Initiative focussed primarily on access. Concern for expanding access was reinforced by a disseminatory rather than a developmental approach thereby precluding learner control of curriculum from being the most appropriate theory for the case. The Initiative appeared to be driven more by economic and political intentions than philosophical aspirations, learners' needs, equity or technology.

The main focus of the Initiative was the removal of constraints on access, posed in the main, by a shortfall between demand and the number of funded places in the Unified National System of Higher Education. Expanded access was required within precisely defined economic conditions set by the government. This was to be achieved through the application of Fordist principles of mass production and economies of scale. In broad terms, an intention of 'more for less' or, at least for 'no more' was demanded of Australian higher education. This represents a pragmatic focus on cost efficiency and a political mechanism for achieving policy objectives without extending resource commitment which is typical of a technocratic approach. Because the Initiative appeared to be a pragmatic response to the need to expand participation governed by technocratic and economically rationalist considerations, it is best characterised by access oriented conceptions of open learning of a pragmatic rather than a humanistic kind.

In keeping with the anthropological-relativist tradition of curriculum theorising adopted by the study and the interpretive method, it is appropriate to look beyond the Initiative itself to examine its immediate context. Significant aspects of this context are identified to embellish this access conception of the Initiative.

7.3 The contemporary context

The OLI was clearly a curriculum innovation in Australian higher education but it was set within a context of broader, economic and educational reform. The federal government saw a need to change both Australia's isolationist outlook and its economic reliance on primary resources and commodities. The aim was to strengthen

Australia's competitive position within the emerging, global market-place. Reform needed to address Australia's capacity for the rapid technological innovation required in post-industrial contexts and to build exports in manufacturing and services (Dawkins, 1987b:1, 1990b:4; Dawkins and Holding, 1987:3-4).

In this context of economic reform, the Commonwealth government saw the need for educational reform across all systems and levels of provision. Indeed, it considered education as crucial to the achievement of these economic goals (Dawkins, 1987a:1-2; Dawkins and Holding, 1987:6). At the level of schooling, objectives included coordination of both the curriculum and the teaching profession at a national level (Critenden, 1991; Lundin et al., 1991:25-16). A national approach to the school curriculum was pursued through the Australian Education Council (AEC, 1989). The Commonwealth sought agreement from the States and Territories on common objectives for Australian schools. Following an extensive mapping of existing state curricula, national curriculum statements in discipline areas and national profiles of assessment were developed (Dawkins, 1988e:4-5, 1990b:11-12). The Open Learning Technology Corporation, jointly owned by state and federal ministers of education, was also established to support resource sharing, cost rationalisation and the development of national curriculum materials. The accompanying objective of national award and credentialling systems for teachers was pursued through industrial negotiations and the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning (Dawkins, 1990b:13,16; Lundin et al., 1991:16).

At the level of post-secondary education, the Commonwealth targeted expansion of participation in both the TAFE and university sectors and the need for increased flexibility and responsiveness of these educational sectors to national needs (Dawkins, 1988a:10). Higher education was re-structured to amalgamate the CAE and university sectors. Articulation between sectors and between state educational systems was encouraged and a National Working Party on Flexible Delivery instituted. The government recognised the need for ongoing education, training and re-skilling (Dawkins, 1988e:2) and promulgated a vision of Australia as the clever country (e.g. Dawkins, 1990b:13). Political motivation for expansion of higher educational participation also derived from electoral pressures to address unmet demand for university places and high levels of youth unemployment.

In attempting to address these objectives, the government's dilemma was to expand access without overburdening its financial resources and increasing the budget deficit. Public demand for, and political commitment to providing, increased social services across a number of areas exacerbated this problem in a time of fiscal restraint.

Increasingly during the decade 1985-1995, the Commonwealth's approach in responding to these conflicting demands has been an economic rationalist one. General strategies have been to seek cost efficiencies and link wage rises to productivity, to redistribute financial responsibility for services such as education amongst beneficiaries, and to privatise some previously public sector services. In line with this approach, education has increasingly been regarded as an industry rather than an entirely public service (Ramsey, 1991). More productive use of the resources and facilities of higher education was planned through consolidation, rationalisation, efficient management and coordinated provision (Dawkins, 1987a:30-35, 1988a:11). To spread the funding base, undergraduate university students were required to meet 20% of the costs of their education (Dawkins, 1988c:6) and a degree of commercial venturing by universities was permitted and encouraged (e.g. Scott, 1987).

Within this context, the Commonwealth aimed to increase participation in higher education and was prepared to fund moderate growth (Dawkins, 1988b:35). This was, nevertheless, inadequate to meet the level of demand. In broad terms, education was seen as instrumental in the economic development of the nation and reform objectives focussed on 'freeing up' the system to make it more serviceable as a national system for the provision of ongoing education and training. At the same time, greater responsibility for the funding of education was transferred to the private economy.

7.3.1 Centralising control

While the Initiative is not well represented by conceptions of open learning emphasising learner control, it can be seen to further an ongoing trend of increasing Commonwealth control of higher education. This issue was explored in Chapter 5. The trend began after the Murray Report (1957) and has intensified with the creation of a Unified National System of Higher Education. The express purpose of Commonwealth intervention (described in the foregoing section) was to align education more intimately with the needs of the economy. The study thus confirms Campion and Guiton's (1991) view that the OLI is a move towards economic instrumentalism.

Through its Agreement with OLA, the Commonwealth controlled essential elements of the intended curriculum (where curriculum is considered broadly as discussed in Chapter 2). This included the size and scope of the curriculum, modes of delivery, essential services to students and performance standards as well as curriculum and administrative structures for the management of the project and the provision of units. The Commonwealth also determined degree-granting mechanisms by precluding independent university status for Open Learning and controlled its fee and cost structures. These decisions had a profound influence on the remainder of the intended curriculum so that, overall, the influence of the Commonwealth was strong.

Since the Commonwealth is not itself a provider of education, realisation of its intentions for open university under-graduate education required control of policy directions while, at the same time, assuming no direct responsibility for implementation. University establishment is a responsibility of state, rather than federal, legislature. The creation of a new university would presumably have required negotiation with at least one state government, however, this option was not attractive because of its funding implications.

As Australian universities are publicly funded but autonomous organisations, the Commonwealth has no direct control over their internal policy. It can, however, influence that policy and coordinate reform of the system as a whole via the constraints, conditions and incentives built into funding policy which is a Commonwealth government responsibility. In this case, curriculum policy was controlled through commercial contracts let on a competitive basis.

The Commonwealth achieved policy control over the Initiative in a devolved system of implementation and, at the same time, relegated responsibility for ongoing funding to the private sector and end-users. The OLI is a mechanism for expanding educational participation which, apart from establishment costs, incurs no additional burden on the public purse. It assigns delivery of educational services to the private economy while retaining overall control of policy directions at the federal political level of government. However, even though the operating costs of the Initiative have been privatised, the Initiative is unlike an entirely commercial venture because of the conditions and constraints established by the Commonwealth.

Constraints on pricing and service provision are examples of this. OLA is required to peg its fees to Australian students for undergraduate courses to the current HECS fee and rises in the consumer price index. This maintains a sense of comparability with undergraduate courses funded as part of the Unified National System and a perception of equity. It also limits commercialisation. Another major constraint on the Initiative was the requirement that OLA act as a broker of educational services without authority to grant degrees. This constraint enabled the Commonwealth to realise its intentions of providing a means for expanding participation in degree study while simultaneously containing its fiscal obligations.

By imposing its own policy framework on the Initiative, the Commonwealth not only set the cost, management and curriculum structures of the Initiative, but also pursued its objectives for higher education as a whole. It seemed that the Commonwealth aimed to establish and integrate the Initiative within an extended and coordinated, unofficial 'system' of higher educational provision for Australia. This extended beyond the Unified National System funded by the Commonwealth to include private provision such as private universities, non-award, fee-charging courses, the

Open Learning Initiative, for which the Commonwealth has no direct, ongoing, funding responsibility, and courses with revenue-earning export potential.

Establishment of the Initiative has also, intentionally or otherwise, created pressures driving reform of the Unified National System in directions consistent with government objectives. Reform goals for higher education were to harness higher education for the good of the economy, increase its productivity and efficiency, rationalise provision, expand participation, and coordinate curriculum at a national level (Dawkins, 1987a:1,13,35, 1987b:11). Curriculum goals included the elimination of unnecessary duplication, national recognition and portability of courses via credit transfer, articulation between educational sectors (Dawkins, 1988a:36-38, 61-70; NBEET, 1990b:3), national coordination of tertiary entrance (Illing, 1995a) and standardisation of course length and nomenclature (Dawkins, 1988a:35; NBEET, 1989).

The Initiative has acted via its structures and operational mechanisms to exert pressure for the coordination and reform of higher education as a whole by:

- establishing credit transfer precedents,
- providing a core of nationally available units (a common curriculum),
- demonstrating cost efficiencies of provision, and
- encouraging university collaboration.

Since limited funding levels and specific policy constrained development of the Open Learning curriculum in terms of size, range and new course development (pre-existing courses were to be the mainstay of the curriculum), and since OLA was unable to grant degrees, the aim of establishing Open Learning as a pathway to degrees was reliant upon credit transfer. Credit transfer was demanded of participating universities and this broke new ground. This effect of the Initiative of encouraging institutions to collaborate, to relax their entry requirements and improve credit transfer has also been recognised by the Senate Inquiry into open learning (Senate Inquiry, 1994).

One interpretation of the changes currently taking place in Australian higher education is that the system is undergoing a process of democratisation. This suggests a new focus for understanding Open Learning which is in terms of mass education.

7.4 A new focus for interpretation of Australian OLI

It has been suggested that Australia is currently moving from an elite to a mass system of higher education (Anderson, 1990; McGaw, 1992:53; c.f. Moodie, 1992a:10). While there is some confusion over the definition of mass education[2] and some difficulty in interpreting measures of participation due to the use of alternative methods for its calculation and expression, it seems that participation in higher education is certainly increasing to unprecedented levels (DEET, 1993b:17; McGaw, 1992:52; Williams et al., 1993:17).

Open Learning and the onset of mass higher education are concurrent phenomena in Australia and both involve increasing participation. Additional similarities suggest the OLI is linked to **educational democratisation**. This is explored in the following sections.

7.4.1 Mass education

While mass education certainly involves increasing rates of participation, it is generally agreed that much more than quantitative growth is involved. Significantly, qualitative change in the nature of provision is also an essential element of egalitarian expansion and democratisation (Ceryth and Furth, 1972:21; Corcoran, 1977:83). Pre-existing systems of curriculum organisation, appropriate in an elite system, are severely challenged when educational participation is opened on a mass basis. Across all levels of education, expansion of enrolment creates a tension between the demands of the academic discipline and the needs of the new student body (Sadnytzky and Bereday, 1977:2774). This is reflected in conflict between elitist and egalitarian approaches to provision.

At university level, expansion challenges the traditional concept of the university by broadening both its client and staffing base and by placing increasing demands on its resources and systems of governance (Altbach, 1977:4266). University education for an enlarged clientele from a widening social base, must take into account the abilities, experiences and motivations of this new student group if successful completion is intended (Ceryth and Furth, 1972:22). The resulting conflict between disciplinary standards and traditions on the one hand, and the needs of the students on the other, creates pressure to reform abstract, theoretical, discipline-based systems of organising knowledge towards more purpose-oriented, integrated and thematic curricula (Sadnytzky and Bereday, 1977:2775). According to Ceryth and Furth (1972:22), mass higher education must offer a wide range of fields of study and accept the equality of fields of study whether they be traditional disciplines or practical, problem oriented and interdisciplinary. Teaching methods are also challenged by expanding participation.

Within the discourse of lifelong education, Vinokur (1976:314) recognised that universal and continuing access exerts pressure for horizontal and vertical integration of learning. Horizontal integration means that work, home and leisure environments all become sites for education. Vertical integration between levels of education requires articulation and coordination between educational settings and sectors. The use of flexible and varied teaching and learning methods is a natural corollary of these principles (Cropley, 1980:13; Knapper and Cropley, 1985:31-3; Vinokur, 1976:314). A further corollary is the need for greater acknowledgment of prior learning. Thus, in addition to egalitarian expansion, democratisation necessarily involves a broadening of the curriculum, an increasingly realistic focus and greater use of learner-centred rather than institution-centred or discipline-centred approaches[3].

It has been argued that mass participation in higher education is not likely to be achieved without significantly reduced cost levels and radically transformed instructional methods (Trow, 1974 and Williams, 1979:110 both cited in Moodie, 1992a). It is thought that cost levels may need to be lowered by an order of magnitude and this will require innovation which may well transform present teaching methods (Moodie, 1992a). Hamilton (1989:103-105 cited in Moodie, 1992a:2) noted that, in moving to mass primary education, teaching was changed from systems for individual instruction, such as that provided by a tutor or governess, to methods for simultaneous group instruction. In the first group settings, learners were still taught individually, in turns. Class methods, which were analogous to the batch methods of factory production (Moodie, 1992a), allowed simultaneous instruction of students and this was more socially and economically efficient (Hamilton, 1989:103-105 cited in Moodie, 1992a:3). At university level, a similar change to industrialised teaching methods to cope with enlarged student numbers has also been noted (Sewart, 1992:230-232).

There have been suggestions that technology may provide a means of achieving further cost reductions in post-secondary education (Moodie, 1992a). This implies that technology could be important to the achievement of mass and universal higher education. With respect to the potential for cost savings through the use of media-based education, Rumble (1987) concluded that savings of great magnitude can only be achieved when media are used to replace, rather than supplement, the teacher and capital is substituted for labour in a mass production rather than crafted approach with a larger student-to-teacher ratio than has been customary in the past. This suggests that if technological innovation is to assist in reducing the cost levels of education, then labour saving technologies need to be used.

As an example of ways in which this might be achieved, Moodie (1992b) indicated that significant savings could be realised in the TVOLP through the automation of routine processes in order to service a large number of students in cheaper, less labour intensive ways. An example would be registration by voice mail. His proposed strategy for introducing an only somewhat speculative 'electronic university' began with confining the use of technology to successful working models rather than prototypes. Those technologies with demonstrated cost effectiveness could then be applied to simple administrative processes in the first instance, before proceeding with their use in simple communications and more sophisticated teaching and learning applications. Moodie considered that there would necessarily be a transformation in the accompanying notion of quality as a cheap, quick mass handling system replaced an individual but slow and expensive service.

In moving from elite to mass provision of education, numerical expansion is accompanied by qualitative change in curriculum and administration. Expansion is facilitated by innovations to reduce the per unit cost of providing instruction and curricula are pressured to be more realistic, integrated and learner centred. Over time, these changes are likely to transform expectations and ideas about its nature and quality.

7.4.2 The OLI as democratisation

The OLI exhibited a number of features typical of educational democratisation and this leads to the suggestion that open learning is a manifestation of educational democratisation. The Initiative's role in extending participation has already been noted as has its aim of cost efficiency. In addition to this, the Initiative also exhibited some of the characteristic qualitative changes of democratisation noted above.

It is noteworthy, although not of course unique, that distance methods were employed in the Initiative. Broadcast television in conjunction with print materials and the postal service provided a means of offering unlimited (mass) access and, at the same time, allowed learner-centred flexibilities as to location and time. Additional concessions offering greater flexibility to students in the Initiative were an extension of the time limit for degree completion to ten years and provision of four study periods per year.

The curriculum was responsive to an egalitarian and diverse client base. Its opening courses were necessarily introductory for students who may have had no previous experience of the subject. Even so, the units were of university standard so it is not surprising that prominence was given to learning skills in the expectation that numbers of students would be novice learners. For example, guidance on study skills was provided to newly registered students and a student advisory service was also available (OLAA, 1993b:2). From June, 1993, foundation and bridging courses, as well as units on 'learning to learn' became available for a fee (OLAA, 1993h:6). At least one unit is also known to have contained a program for developing learning skills embedded within it. Admittedly, a focus on learning skills is, again, not unique to Open Learning. In recent times, this curriculum specialty has become something of an informal growth area in higher education. This is probably indicative of an expanding client base and democratising influences in the sector as a whole.

Yet despite the consideration given to novice learners by OLA, there was evidence of tension between traditional academic standards and the abilities of the new client intake. Concern to maintain academic standards was reflected in course reviews and the examination policy which stipulated that Open Learning students undertake the same exams at the same time as conventional students. Concern for students unfamiliar with the academic demands of university study produced some initial tolerance of lower standards. For example, in one introductory unit, a standard of achievement intermediate between matriculation and first year level was reportedly accepted as satisfactory, in the first of three assessment items, as a means of easing students into university level study (Whitlock, 12.7.93, pers. com.).

The Initiative also showed a trend towards broader, flatter curricula. It comprised generalist courses which were not highly specialised. Also emerging was a degree with reduced hierarchical structuring of content and increased disciplinary spread. The Bachelor of General Studies could be attained with a compilation of first and second level units across several faculties and did not require study at third year level. This degree structure, which was relatively novel to Australian higher education, could be expected to promote cross-disciplinary studies and is evidence of a movement towards thematic, purpose-oriented curricula. The intention to make use of inter-disciplinary units (OLAA IAPB, 1993:3, minute no. 15,17; OLAA, 1993f) is further evidence of a move towards integrated curricula. While this was intended for economic rather than egalitarian reasons, the trend is nevertheless the same.

This analysis suggests that the curriculum innovation which was the OLI was not simply a matter of expanding access, although this was a strong component. It was also a matter of adjusting to the consequences of expanding student intake and achieving an increase in participation in a cost efficient way. The Initiative was responsive to the democratising influence of an expanded and diverse student market. It employed flexible, learner-centred techniques and offered a less hierarchical and more integrated curriculum characteristic of democratised systems. The typical tension between open access and academic standards was also present.

For these reasons, it is proposed to interpret the Initiative as part of an ongoing process of educational democratisation in association with the realisation of mass higher education in Australia. In an address to the First International Conference on Open Learning in Brisbane, Pritchard (10.11.94, pers. com.) also stated that the OLI was playing a role in the attainment of mass higher education. However, no justification or elaboration of this similar but independent conclusion was given.

Conceiving of the Initiative in terms of educational democratisation is distinct from access conceptions of it because, while opening access and mass education may be but two sides of the same coin, the first one does not necessarily entail the other. Until a critical level of student participation is reached, elite systems can be expanded without fundamental reform to their curriculum. During the nineteenth century, for example, university participation was increased but not, according to Connell (1980:3,364), sufficiently to prompt the changes typical of democratisation. On the other hand, interpreting the Initiative in this way does not invalidate descriptive, access-oriented and learner-centred conceptions of it. Rather it extends and integrates these within the unifying umbrella of democratisation. This has the advantages of synthesising existing conceptions, improving understanding and increasing explanatory power.

In their theories of curriculum control, neither Lundgren (1983) nor Bernstein (1974) referred to the concept of democratisation. Nevertheless, their theories encompass the changing context and curriculum reforms accompanying democratisation. It is, therefore, possible to extend the interpretation of the Initiative as a manifestation of democratisation using curriculum code theory.

7.4.3 Curriculum code theory and the OLI

In seeking to interpret the Initiative in terms of curriculum code theory, the five codes discussed in Chapter 2 serve as potential descriptors of the case. The classical, realistic and moral codes can be quickly dismissed for they are collection codes referring to discipline-centred curricula. The Initiative, on the other hand, was learner centred and, even though the range of units was limited, these did not constitute a classical curriculum. The range of units was expanding to be comparable with the curricula of contemporary, generalist university courses. In addition, the classical and realistic codes describe elitist systems whereas the Initiative was concerned with opening access without restriction. It offered learner-centred flexibilities extending well beyond the limited subject choices available under the realistic code as new subjects were added to the classical collection. The Initiative did not emphasise moral values or attitudes as the moral code had done, making this code inappropriate even though it was similar to the Initiative in its association with expanding access - in its case, at the level of schooling.

Since neither the classical, realistic or moral codes adequately portray the Initiative, it remains to determine if either the rational or the invisible codes are appropriate. Both of these codes are associated with mass education as, it is proposed, is the Initiative. In both codes, there is a focus on the individual and democratic choices and both relate to integrated, learner-centred curricula. Both utilise rational, technocratic approaches to curriculum development, both involve education more closely with productive, social processes and both encompass increasing state interest and control in education. These features were also characteristic of the Initiative and this confirms the relevance of curriculum code theory in this instance.

Distinguishing between the two codes is not an easy task, however, because the one grew within and subsumed, rather than replaced, the other.

The main difference between the rational and invisible codes lies in the mechanisms each employs for curriculum control. As education became a mass and publicly funded endeavour, it became a topic of increasing concern to the state and the subject of investigation and intervention. Initially, under the rational code, curriculum was directed by the specification of texts, syllabi and assessments. Control was overt, external and contained in the materials themselves (Lundgren, 1983:34). As educational bureaucracies grew and research on education increased, reforms were increasingly legitimated by educational research. Curriculum theorising became an established enterprise. Curriculum development thus became the province of specialist technologists and teaching came to be shaped through the socialisation and training of teachers. These more subtle means of control, which acted through the professional and managerial ethos of education itself, mark the invisible curriculum code.

In the OLI, state interest was focussed on increasing access and cost efficiency. It did not extend to specifying content in fine detail or to seeking to regulate the teaching activities of academic staff. Nevertheless, Commonwealth control of the Initiative was strong and this control was exercised through the clearly visible mechanisms of funding and legislation. On this basis, the Initiative does not fulfil the criteria of the invisible code and is considered to be an expression of the rational curriculum code in response to pressures to increase participation in higher education. The influence of this code is manifest in the technocratic, learner-centred approach adopted in the Initiative and in its pragmatic responsiveness to contextual pressures and constraints in opening higher education on a mass basis.

The Initiative is, thus, interpreted as part of the process of expanding and democratising higher educational provision, coordinating and integrating this educational sector more closely with the general economy and bringing higher education more firmly under the control of the Commonwealth government using curriculum control philosophies and mechanisms typical of democratisation and the rational curriculum code. It is proposed that the educational phenomenon which is open learning may be understood in similar terms. This proposal is explored in the remainder of the chapter. The discussion thus moves beyond any specific instance of open learning to general theoretical considerations.

Although it is recognised that open learning is being employed in countries of many political persuasions, the discussion centres on countries, like Australia, with a democratic philosophy. In these countries, educational democratisation has been accompanied by philosophies of individualism and democracy. In non-democratic countries, mass systems of education are also being developed but it is expected that the philosophies accompanying these are appropriate to the political outlook of the governments concerned. This is further evidence that mass education is as much connected to meeting national needs related to human capital as it is to democratic principles of opening access.

7.5 New meaning for open learning

Open learning was identified in Chapter 4 as a form of progressive education. This necessitates extending the time frame for its interpretation beyond contemporary, post-industrial contexts. It is not necessary to detail the development of progressive education as a whole, for this purpose and, in any case, that task has already been addressed (e.g. Cremin, 1962; Lundgren, 1983). The intention is, rather, to place open learning within a broader, explanatory framework using curriculum code theory as appropriate.

The discussion begins with an analysis of key points of difference between open learning and earlier progressive forms. It is argued that these differences are logically consistent with, and largely explicable in terms of, open learning's primary focus on the adult learner. Examination of the history of opening opportunities for adult learning then shows that characteristics of open learning such as open access, curriculum choice, flexibility and the use of alternative modes of delivery, have been developing for some considerable length of time. The significance of the post-industrial context in the development of open learning is then considered. Following this, curriculum code theory is used to model the historical pattern of development of this educational form. In blending open learning with code theory, some necessary modifications to code theory are indicated.

7.5.1 Novel features of open learning

Open learning appears to be distinctive as a progressive form of education in its concern for the adult learner rather than school students and in its increased reliance on communications technology. Although Dewey (1916:281) regarded learning as a lifelong process, integral to living itself, his progressive, educational theory was, nevertheless, aimed primarily at the education of the young. Similarly, open education largely targeted classroom learners (e.g. Donald and Myers, 1973; Stephens, 1974). By contrast, open learning is aimed primarily at adult learners and school leavers through open university and other post-secondary programs. Although there have been some recent attempts to apply open learning to school level education (e.g. Lacey, 1993), the general conclusion that open learning is a post-secondary phenomenon remains.

Recognition of its adult focus allows a number of divergent facets of open learning to be drawn together and adds to coherence. Within this explanatory framework, it becomes logical that, in open learning, strong emphasis is placed on lifelong education and the principles of adult learning[4]. These emphases were recognised in *Open Learning and Distance Education in Canada* (1989:7). In turn, any prescriptive and progressive theory advocating extension of learning throughout life, to adults in diverse personal environments, could be expected to show accommodations to the learning needs of adults. Progressive principles advocate adapting instruction to the talents, needs and circumstances of learners in a learner-centred approach. In the case of adult learners, this involves integration of learning with adults' domestic and work contexts and modification of courses in recognition of their diverse backgrounds and varied needs.

In open learning programs, learner centredness (a progressive trait) is operationalised in distinctive and novel ways which can be understood in relation to its adult audience and contemporary technological capability. For instance, adult learners' varied educational backgrounds create pressure for the recognition of prior learning achievements from both institutional settings and life experiences as well as pressure for credit transfer and credit bank mechanisms. Their varied lifestyles and commitments demand work and home-based education and training as well as instructional programs which are flexible as to the time, location and pace at which learning takes place.

Open learning facilitates lifelong, adult learning through open age entry, open pacing, opening curriculum, open location and the removal of prerequisites which might otherwise prevent access. These are not merely matters of educational philosophy and policy but involve considerable administrative innovation for their implementation. Areas at the forefront of attempts to remove barriers to adult participation include the harmonisation of accreditation systems, development of credit accumulation and transfer systems, recognition of prior learning (RPL), modularisation of courses and the development of bridging and project-based courses (Tuckett, 1989:75).

Modern technological capacity and improved communications capabilities have facilitated the cost efficient integration of learning with adult learners' everyday contexts and this can account for the prominence sometimes accorded to technology in open learning. Features of open learning such as modularisation of units of study, RPL and credit transfer facilitate flexibility and the meeting of adults' learning needs by enabling them to tailor programs to their own particular interests, prior knowledge, learning needs and capabilities. This is consistent with adult learning theory which recognises that adults learn best when topics are relevant to their current interests and learning builds upon prior experience (Knowles, 1990:86).

While these innovations are hardly all unique to open learning, their presence as part of this phenomenon is consistent with its adult focus. This is so because extension of education beyond the compulsory years is thought to depend upon open access and the techniques of open learning (Johnson, 1990b:77). Thus, while the underlying structural elements of open learning are closely akin to earlier progressive movements, its novel features can be accounted for in terms of its adult audience and post-industrial, technological developments.

As another source of support for the new interpretation, the following section examines the history of expanding opportunities for adult learning. This demonstrates the gradual development of curriculum elements now associated with open learning and it is significant that these developments took place before the advent of the concept itself. In the account which follows, particular attention is directed to the history of opening access and to the development of flexible, integrated, learner centred curricula in the university sector. The section sets open learning within the broader historical context of educational democratisation in that sector. The discussion is limited to Western developments and focusses on broad patterns of change. For this reason, no one specific country is targetted. The broad trends identified give meaning to open learning as part of a more general process of expanding opportunities for adult education.

7.5.2 Opening opportunities for adult learning

The modern movement for the education of adults is thought to have originated with the industrial revolution (Boshier, 1980:182). This movement was an outcome of earlier changed attitudes to knowledge associated with the development of humanism, realism and the rise of the scientific spirit which culminated in the great flowering of learning which was the European Enlightenment (Phillipson, 1974:407) and the age of scientific revolutions.

Prior to the industrial revolution, institutionalised higher education was provided by the basically medieval institution of the university which had been established in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Ellwood, 1976:18; Haskins, 1957:1). In many early European and American universities, access was initially restricted by the religious status of university entrance since it was linked to the taking of Holy Orders, religious tests[5] (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:15) and celibacy (Jepson, 1973:15).

Although originally egalitarian[6] (Domonkos, 1977:2028), by the eighteenth century, university education had become the privilege of a very small, but influential, section of the population (Ellwood, 1976:18-19) and the mark of a gentleman[7] (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:289). The difficulties and costs of travel and living away from home and the need for a grounding in Latin, and perhaps Greek, contributed to this elite function (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:11-12) as did the role of the universities in credentialling the learned professions. Universities were few in number and women were excluded.

The curriculum concentrated on a fixed body of knowledge called the liberal arts which was composed of the language arts (classical and modern languages, literature) and philosophy (ethics, politics, physics, mathematics and natural science, for example, botany and divinity). These subjects comprised a collection integrated by the Ramist philosophy of the unity of knowledge which saw the various disciplines as aspects of god's divine order (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:13-15).

While the outward structure remained the same as the medieval curriculum, the content by the eighteenth century reflected humanistic interests more prominent since the Renaissance and scientific studies. Yet despite the inclusion of natural philosophy, the prevailing conception was that formal knowledge was predetermined, static and given, residing in literature treasured from the past (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:14). Before 1800, a professor's role was to propagate, but not necessarily expand, existing knowledge (Turner, 1974:496). Learning was a process of mental discipline, initiation and mastery of a classical curriculum. Universities were not the centres of intellectual inquiry in society. That role was filled by Academies and Royal Societies which had been established from 1560 and in the 1600s (Domonkos, 1977:2032; Turner, 1974:501).

In this system of tuition, students had little choice. All undergraduates studied for the

Bachelor of Arts after which they could continue with a Master of Arts and specialist training in law, medicine or theology (Domonkos, 1977:2028). All the subjects in the curriculum were compulsory and a single professor taught all subjects (McGrath and Meeth, 1965:27). This lack of specialisation remained the pattern well into the nineteenth century in England (Engel, 1974:347) although some specialisation had occurred in North America before this (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:83). Latin and theology had a central role in the curriculum following the influence of Christianity and the Roman Empire (De Young and Wynn, 1972:212). Except in the innovatory German universities of Halle and Göttingen which were the flag bearers of the reforms which revitalised and reshaped universities in the subsequent period, teaching was conducted in Latin (Domonkos, 1977:2033). This was understandable since all learned books, except for the Greek classics, were in Latin.

At this stage, the curriculum retained its medieval form with set times and examinations (e.g. Haskins, 1957:24). Instruction took place on a face-to-face basis. Although considerable informal intellectual discussion took place through letters, this method was not, at this stage, developed as a system of instruction (e.g. Daniel, 1988:178). Teaching methods were consistent with the conception of knowledge prevalent at the time and based largely on exposition of the classics, pedantry, encyclopaedic repetition and the study of logic (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:86-91; Turner, 1974:495).

During the nineteenth century, pressure for adult education grew. The role of the universities in society was queried[8] and the elitist provision of higher education challenged (Jepson, 1973:47). The most important innovation in higher education during this century was thought to be its harnessing for economic and social development (Altbach, 1991). The pattern of change frequently involved alternative arrangements for tertiary provision, for example, local colleges and technical and vocational schools which subsequently gained university status[9] and also goaded reform in traditional institutions (e.g. Ellwood, 1976:22; Marriott, 1981:5). The proliferation of such schools and colleges meant that higher education was no longer the exclusive province of the universities (Ellwood, 1976:25).

As opportunities for adult education expanded, the curriculum became more appropriate to contemporary society. By 1800, the use of Latin as a vehicle of instruction was already diminishing with teaching taking place more frequently in the local vernacular (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:92). During this century, the nature of the subjects studied became more relevant to modern society, the curriculum was dislocated from religion and broadened with the addition of scientific and vocational studies (Domonkos, 1977:2034) and students were allowed greater choice over subject selection (Chaplin, 1977:3216). The universities were also reoriented towards research, scientific discovery and specialisation following the German examples (Domonkos, 1977:2034; Turner, 1974:531).

German thought contributed the philosophy of academic freedom to conduct research and teach according to one's own religious beliefs and conceptions of truth (Domonkos, 1977:2033). It was also the source of Lernfreiheit, the freedom of the student to choose their own program of study (Chaplin, 1977:3216). This was associated with Protestantism and the emerging nation states which diminished the control of the church (Shimbori, 1977:863). Together with the impact of Darwinism later that century, this helped untie the curriculum from religion and its perceived unity in divine order.

The unifying principle became philosophy, conceived as the quest for knowledge through rational, scientific method (Shimbori, 1977:863). Under the widespread influence of rationalist thought, school teaching became a technology subject to the techniques of scientific management and theories of psychology (Bowen, 1972:373, 531). Higher education expanded the size and range of its curriculum offering but retained its traditional, disciplinary form (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:275; Connell, 1980:3,364). This is indicative of the realistic code in operation at that time.

Lehrnfreiheit, the freedom to study in the area of one's choice contributed, in the USA, to the development of the elective system (Chaplin, 1977:3216). Choice had become necessary because of the broadening of the curriculum (Dressel, 1963:3) as educational reformers sought to introduce scientific and vocational subjects in the interests of national development and as a means of attracting clients in a situation of oversupply in American higher education (Collins, 1979:121). Even though it was necessary for more pragmatic reasons, choice was advocated on the grounds of individual freedom (Ben-David, 1972:56). Early innovation, such as Jefferson's plan for the University of Virginia in 1825 and Ticknor's program for Cambridge (USA), allowed choice between schools of study but, within parallel courses, subjects were still prescribed (Dressel, 1963:3). Later, electives were offered within parallel courses.

Initially, there was little demand or status for the new courses and they were criticised on the grounds of standards (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:109). In the 1870s, Eliot introduced the elective system to Harvard (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:109; Dressel, 1963:4). By then, industrialisation and urbanisation were stimulating a need for training in many specialisations and there were growing philosophies of utilitarianism and social efficiency (Ben-David, 1972:56; Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:110-169, 63). These sought to capitalise on the perceived benefits of education for individuals and society. At the same time, there was increasing mobilisation of educational resources in class struggles (Collins, 1979:122-124; Johnson, 1983b:31). Socialism and a popular, utopian spirit fanned hope for a more just and equitable society (Boshier, 1980:8; Bowen, 1972:373). This hope was supported by evolutionary theory which promulgated the possibility of gradual improvement and social reconstruction (Smith, P., 1990:53).

Although the new degrees were at first held in little regard, they gradually gained prestige, not as Collins (1979:122-124) has argued through their immediate vocational practicality, but through redefinition of the notion of liberal education to incorporate the objective pursuit of knowledge through science, appeal to a vague utility and the continuation of its role as a means of social certification.

In stark comparison with the original, limited degree structure of the medieval university, around 1900 some 200 different degrees were available in the United States (Dressel, 1963:56). A number of other changes associated with the new scientific outlook have been documented by Brubacher and Rudy (1968:87-92, 176). One of these was that teaching methods diversified in order to accommodate the new subjects and to adjust humanities subjects to scientific thinking. Lecturers also became responsible for reorganising and synthesising the knowledge to be transmitted. Thus, while the student was still regarded as a vessel to be filled, more attention was given to motivating students with Honours programs, seminars and problem methods. The centre of educational gravity, as these authors (1968:272) saw it, began to move towards the students, particularly in non-professional, American college courses competing for clients. Even so, the new subjects did not disturb the traditional separation of knowledge into disciplines except for trials of an interdisciplinary approach in the American experimental colleges (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:275, 277).

In England, throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century there was growing pressure for adult education including education for the working classes (Johnson, 1983b:31) and education for women (e.g. Ellwood, 1976:5; Jepson, 1973:47). In this climate, innovations were spawned which had a direct bearing on the subsequent development of open learning. In the 1880s, there were proposals for an open-type degree granting university available to all persons with a minimum of entry requirements (Marriott, 1981:1, 21). The aim was to reform liberal education to suit working people through 'elasticity' of curriculum. This involved modularisation of courses and assessment, and part-time, non-residential, off-campus study. The proposed scheme was envisaged as a fully accredited, national system of higher education based on itinerant teaching (Burrow, 1976:22).

In England, programs known as university extension were established along these lines but these were never given authority to grant degrees (Burrows, 1976:24; Marriott, 1981:90). Opportunities for part-time university study and adult full-time study remained limited until the establishment of the Open University [10] (Perry, W., 1976:2-3).

In the United States, however, the idea of university extension was adopted quickly and developed at a time of popular interest in learning (Marriott, 1981:19; Wedmeyer, 1983:132). In the process, the traditional expectation of full-time, on-campus attendance was laid to rest. Part-time degree study thus developed in the United States (Blyth, 1983:353) opening up attendance options and time schedules as the London external degree had done, but offering, in addition, a system of instruction and staged assessment.

A large boost to the acceptance of the extension concept came when William Rainey Harper founded the Chicago University in 1892 and formed a special department of extension (MacKenzie et al., 1968:27-28). This department included correspondence and home-study as well as evening courses and extra-mural lectures and was structurally linked to the audio-visual function. This provided an important link between the emerging fields of distance education and educational technology.

Harper is credited with gaining acceptance for correspondence and extension study leading to degrees (MacKenzie et al., 1968:26-27). Prior to this, correspondence had been used at university level to prepare students for examinations at their local universities or had been offered without degree credit. The Correspondence University of New York, for example, prepared students but lacked authority to examine and grant degrees.

Daniel (1988:177) considered the didactic letters of Saint Paul and their use by the early Christians as an early instance of distance education. However, he also recognised that formal systems for distance study serving large numbers of students were not feasible before the development of mass communication systems. In the first instance, these relied on printing in association with the postal service. Communications media were not widely used for education until the 1960s.

Nevertheless, correspondence, together with extension and external study, had won acceptance for alternative means of delivering instruction and opened up constraints regarding attendance on-campus. These alternatives offered flexibilities which enabled students to study at a time and place more convenient to them. In time, correspondence blossomed into distance education changing its name, in some countries, to keep pace with developing methods of delivering instruction to off-campus learners.

With continued impetus to expand and democratise post-secondary education, with growing pressure to open access and provide integrated, learner-centred curricula suitable for this new clientele, and with enhanced technological capacity to deliver education to distant locations in real time and in flexible ways, this ongoing process of opening opportunities for adult education has been re-christened 'open learning'.

In retrospect, many of the reforms enacted in Western universities in the nineteenth century can be seen to encompass elements which today are identified with open learning. In that century, access was expanded and became more egalitarian with the admission of women and students from other races and religions. Flexible forms of delivery were introduced in the form of correspondence study and university extension. Students were offered choices of curriculum between courses and electives. Teaching methods began to move away from expository method and learning options became more flexible as to the time, place and pace of study. Options such as part-time and external study were introduced as innovations.

Even though these early changes made the curriculum more learner centred in a logistical sense, and broader and more realistic in the number and type of subjects included, the basic disciplinary structure was not disturbed (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:275). Similarly, while access to universities increased greatly during the nineteenth century, the participation rate remained quite a small proportion of the total population (Altbach, 1991; Connell, 1980:3). It was not until the second half of the twentieth century that rising participation in higher education approached mass levels in many countries and challenged these systems towards democratisation (Altbach, 1991; Connell, 1980:360). Apart from the experimental colleges in America which attempted to implement progressive pedagogies at an early stage (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:282), it was not until higher education was challenged by mass access that significant further reform towards integrated, learner-centred curricula and democratisation occurred.

Although post-industrialism cannot account for the broader progressive movement from which ideas and practices for open learning seem to have been extensively drawn, it may be that the post-industrial context is significant for understanding why progressive philosophies came to prominence in adult learning at the temporal and socio-cultural location that they did.

7.5.3 Post-industrial pressures for educational expansion

In the post-industrial context, lifelong education has become more than a liberal virtue. According to the *Final Report of the British Ministry of Reconstruction Adult Education Committee* (1919 cited in Boshier, 1980:189), it had, by the end of the First World War, already become something of a "permanent national necessity" which should be both "universal and lifelong". The force of this message has only intensified in more recent times. As change has increasingly become the norm, occurring at an ever accelerating pace during the course of the century (Toffler, 1971:29), recognition of the need for lifelong education has grown.

Initial education before employment has been argued to be no longer sufficient for either the individual or the needs of industry and society (e.g. Faure, 1972:181,218). There are demands for both higher, initial qualifications and continual upgrading and professional development. These trends have been accompanied by increasing reliance on educational credentials to establish labour competence (Lundgren, 1983:32) so that the sorting and selection function of education for the labour market has operated at increasingly higher levels of education (Collins, 1979:5,194). Collins (1979:129) has questioned the technical necessity of increasing institutionalised education to this extent and attributes the so-called 'credential creep' to class and ethnic struggles. For whatever reason, there has been an inflationary trend in the value of educational credentials as well as a rapidly changing information environment leading to increasing levels of demand for education beyond the schooling years. What is more, the declining demand for labour in capital efficient industry means that education serves an important economic and social function by absorbing potential workers and assisting to maintain consumer demand (Collins, 1979:194). This has also contributed to pressures to extend formal education.

Additional pressure to expand post-secondary education, as well as the means for achieving it, has been generated by post-industrial, technological advance. On the one hand, the rapid obsolescence of knowledge has increased the necessity for ongoing re-education and retraining. On the other hand, technology has provided means of communicating and teaching at a distance which have facilitated individualisation of instruction and integration of learning with adult learners' everyday environments. Altbach (1991:191) and Lundgren (1983:30) have also drawn attention to an ongoing process of integrating formal education with the economy.

Through the workings of all of these processes, individuals have been pressured to reach higher levels of educational attainment. Rising participation at lower levels of education has stimulated demand for increased provision at succeeding levels (Sadnytzky and Bereday, 1977:2773). Conversely, extension of educational participation at higher levels was initially limited by poor retention at lower levels and the small proportion of the cohort seeking to continue.

As a consequence of these processes, there has been a tendency for educational participation to increase to mass and then universal levels successively across levels of education. Thus, while primary education became compulsory before 1900 in many Western countries, higher education was still the preserve of small proportions of the population until after World War II (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:280; Connell, 1980:4,360). In the post-industrial age, the cutting edge of expansion and democratisation has reached post-secondary level as careers previously learned within the work context through apprenticeships are increasingly professionalised requiring tertiary qualifications and work-place retraining is increasingly formalised. Open learning has a role to play in this scenario and is interpreted, in this study, within this context.

298

7.5.4 Open learning and the democratisation of post-secondary education

In essence, open learning is considered to be a re-surfacing of liberal, progressive philosophy within a new context and time. The core of the proposal is that open learning is a manifestation of the democratisation of post-secondary education. In response to post-industrial pressures for educational expansion, increasing participation is challenging post-secondary and higher levels of education towards egalitarian provision. It will be argued that since curriculum patterns similar to those displayed by open learning are evident during earlier periods of expansion in primary, and later secondary, education, the present expansion at post-secondary level represents a re-enactment of the democratisation process which accompanied the expansion of schooling in earlier times.

The increasing prominence of open learning, world wide, is seen as part of a process of aligning post-compulsory education more intimately with the economy and extending educational participation at this level on a mass basis. Opening access and increasing participation pressures these systems to reform curricula towards more learner-centred, integrated curricula. In the context of an adult student population, this has given rise to the educational systems and philosophies encompassed by open learning. The principles of curriculum organisation accompanying democratisation are encapsulated in integrated curriculum codes. Open learning is considered to be a manifestation of the rational curriculum code which also guided the democratisation of schooling in democratic, capitalist societies.

Much of the evidence supporting this proposal has already been introduced in the argument that open learning is both adult focussed and progressive, in the post-industrial and post-secondary locations of open learning, in the nature of educational democratisation and in the context of pressures for post-secondary educational expansion. It remains to draw attention to the parallels which exist between open learning and curricula reformed for mass provision according to the rational curriculum code. It also remains to provide further evidence that democratisation has proceeded successively across levels of education.

However, as open learning actually came to prominence during the proposed period of influence of the rational code's successor, that is, under the period governed by the invisible code, elaboration of this thesis entails justifying why open learning is not considered to be an expression of this subsequent code. Accepting open learning as a manifestation of the rational code then necessitates adjustments to curriculum code theory. The theory needs to accommodate a lag in the full implementation of the rational code at tertiary level in comparison to schooling and a corresponding lag in the progression to the subsequent code at that level.

7.5.5 Open learning and curriculum code theory

There are strong parallels between the patterns of curriculum organisation seen in open learning and the rational code. In essence, the cornerstones of the rational code, namely, humanism, a focus on the individual and their democratic freedom of choice, and technocratic curriculum development are all evident in open learning.

In the same way that the rational code was associated with educational expansion and progressive pedagogy, open learning is also both progressive and expansionary, providing for growth in post-secondary participation through open access and adaptation to the life styles of adult learners through learner-centred teaching methods emphasising individualisation and flexibility. The policies, practices and ideals of open learning such as open access, learner centredness, credit transfer, RPL and modularisation of curriculum are consistent with the rational code in their humanism and their focus on the individual, adult learner. The technocratic nature of open learning is evidenced by its applicability to work-place education and the development of human capital. It is also seen in its use of pre-prepared, individualised instructional materials which have a reputation for technocratic design and delivery (Apple, 1982:153).

For consistency, one might expect to observe in open learning some reorganisation of curricula, or expansion into new fields of study, according to mass interests and practical demands. This trend for realistic, integrated curricula has been recognised in higher education and post-secondary education generally in association with democratisation. Altbach (1991:195,197), for example, noted that expansion of universities led to democratising reforms including more interdisciplinary and vocational courses, change to the rigidly hierarchical organisation of the university and more democratic decision-making. In its application to a great variety of education and training programs, open learning would seem to be in the forefront of curriculum development for integration with practical applications and everyday use and in the forefront of reform to align formal education more closely with productive processes.

Organisational patterns in open learning tend to be flatter, networking structures rather than hierarchical, pyramidal structures (Peters, O., 1993:52) and this is also consistent with a movement away from collection codes towards integrated codes. With open learning, there is, perhaps, even further potential for integration which is yet to be realised. Through learning technologies which can operate from almost any location either in real time or asynchronously, and through the establishment of learning networks, open learning has potential to break traditional, hierarchical patterns of knowledge creation, distribution, dissemination and control and become a tool for all human endeavour rather than the preserve of a few (e.g. Snell, 1987:166-168).

To reiterate, open learning is consistent with the rational code in its learner centredness, individualisation of instruction, rational-scientific approach to curriculum delivery and design, open access, open curriculum and movement towards integrated studies. However, before accepting the congruence of open learning and the rational code, it is necessary to consider the possibility of a better fit between open learning and the invisible code. This involves examining the temporal inconsistency previously noted in the operation of the rational and invisible at tertiary level.

7.5.6 Open learning and the invisible curriculum code

The open learning concept began to flourish following the establishment of the Open University in United Kingdom in 1969. According to the timeline Lundgren (1983:34) has suggested for the operation of the various curriculum codes, open learning was developed and came to prominence, not during the period of operation of the rational code, but during that of its successor. Because of this timing discrepancy, it is necessary to consider whether open learning is a manifestation of this succeeding code rather than the rational code as proposed. In the case of the OLI, this alternative has already been rejected but there is additional relevant information which applies to open learning as a whole.

Against the proposal that open learning is associated with the rational code, there are indications of developing 'invisible' means of control in higher and tertiary education generally. These can be seen in:

- the growing importance of higher and other post-secondary education in all areas of society and their continued, erratic expansion (Altbach, 1991:193; Aronowitz and Giroux, 1986:163),
- increasing demands for university accountability particularly to state funding authorities (Altbach 1991:197-9),
- pressures reducing universities' margins of autonomy (Trow, 1972 cited in Reisman, 1973:459),
- moves to control the work of academics, for example, through loss of tenure and appointment conditional upon performance evaluations which include assessment of teaching (Altbach, 1991:199; Aronowitz and Giroux, 1986:175),
- growth of university administration bureaucracies, (e.g. Smith, D., and

Saunders, 1991:10 with respect to the United Kingdom), and

- increasing use of educational research to improve academic teaching, for example, the current quality movement in Australia (e.g. Baldwin, 1991b).

This is indicative of growing government interest in post-secondary education and increasing intervention by the state in teaching at that level. Of itself, however, this is insufficient to warrant identification of open learning with the invisible code. The code seems to be in a developing, rather than an entrenched phase, in the tertiary sector and, in any case, open learning may not necessarily reflect the sector as a whole.

Open learning and distance education, being the province of expert curriculum technologists and the subjects of distinctive fields of research could, perhaps, be regarded as the advance guard in post-secondary education of practices consistent with the invisible code, rather than representative of the rational code. On the other hand, research in distance education and open learning is a somewhat marginal affair directed primarily at trials and evaluations. It does not appear to constitute a well developed, 'hidden' means of implementing state control. What is more, universities in many Western countries are autonomous institutions. State control of their curriculum and teaching activities, including their open learning curricula, is less developed than the state control of school education. Other state-run tertiary teaching institutions, such as TAFE in Australia, are also granted a high degree of academic freedom and industry clients of open learning are even further removed from government control of their educational activities.

For these reasons and because participation at this level is still rising to mass levels, open learning is not considered to meet the criteria of the invisible curriculum code. In Australia, the current Commonwealth drive for quality in higher education (e.g. Higher Education Council, 1992b), perhaps, signals the transition from the rational to the invisible code. The quality movement embodies a theorising about tertiary curricula, a re-education of tertiary educators according to the findings of educational research, and the exercise of increasing Commonwealth government interest and control of tertiary education. Concern for quality has been noted as a global trend in higher education (Craft, 1994:viii; van Vught, 1994:4).

On this basis, open learning, a post-secondary phenomenon of the seventies, eighties and, at least, the early nineties, is argued to be an expression of the rational curriculum code in the post-industrial era when, according to Lundgren (1983:34), the invisible code had gained supremacy. It remains, for the sake of coherence, to accommodate this anomaly, if possible, with Lundgren's curriculum code theory.

7.5.7 Accommodating the temporal anomaly

Such an accommodation is most simply achieved by extending the time limit suggested by Lundgren for the operation of the rational code, at least in respect of tertiary education, thereby postponing the point of transition to the invisible code at this level. This is justified by evidence that the curriculum reforms described by the two integrated codes have been slower to influence higher levels of education than primary and secondary levels.

The rational code is associated with mass education and encompasses the reforms commonly accompanying democratisation. According to Connell (1980:4), primary education was responding to the progressive influences of child study and psychology by 1900 and these practices had become entrenched by the 1940s. This indicates the activity of the rational code at primary level early this century.

At the same time, secondary and tertiary study retained their classical form with the addition of some new subjects (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:275; Connell, 1980:3, 370). Universities, which had expanded in the last quarter of the previous century, remained elitist. The curriculum had been broadened to serve a growing number of professions but the integrity of the elitist, disciplinary structure had been retained. This indicates a movement from the classical to the realistic code but is contra-indicative of further reform towards integrated curriculum codes at that time.

Fundamental change in the structure and function of secondary education did not take place until after World War II at which time tertiary education was merely expanded (Connell, 1980:336).

Significant progress towards the democratisation of higher education did not take place until after 1950 (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:280) and, according to Connell (1980:360), this did not occur until after 1965. During the 1960s and 1970s, higher education in OECD countries experienced a wave of expansion (Skilbeck and Esnault, 1993:7). In Australia, the Murray and Martin Reports were reflections of these worldwide developments. At this time, curriculum content was reformed along interdisciplinary lines, in accordance with contemporary significance (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:280). Reform of this nature is typical of the rational code which suggests this code had an impact on higher education in the 1960s.

The democratisation of higher education subsequently ground to a halt in the seventies and, only in the late eighties, showed signs of renewal (Altbach, 1991). This slackening has been attributed to economic influences following the 'oil shocks', a slowing of the birth rate and a tightening in attitude towards expansion (Altbach, 1991). The most significant development in higher education during the slack period of the seventies and eighties was the growth in distance education (Keegan and Rumble, 1982:24). This reflected concern for cost efficiency during the economic clawbacks of the time (Karmel, 1989). Universities also diversified into distance education as a means of broadening their enrolment base to maintain their viability in a period of falling school leaver demand (White, 1982).

This historical information points to a lag in the democratisation and extension of education on a mass basis across primary, secondary and tertiary levels. It also suggests a similar lag in the full implementation of the rational code and in the changeover to the invisible code. Such a lag effect could be due, in part, to reliance on secondary retention for tertiary participation but is, possibly, also a consequence of the lower perceived significance of tertiary education for the economy in previous times.

Because successive levels of education have expanded to mass and universal levels of provision at different rates and at different times[11], it is feasible to assume that the pressures for reform induced by expansion and their effects would also come to prominence at successive levels of education at different times. In turn, because the pressures and processes precipitating implementation of mass education and the rational code came into force later at higher levels, earlier modes of practice could be retained for a longer period of time. Because of the lag in expansion and democratisation, state interest in controlling education at higher levels has also been slower in developing and transition to the invisible code has been delayed. This has created a lag in the implementation of the rational and invisible codes across successive levels of education.

Timing differentials for educational democratisation also exist between countries. The process was evident in the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century and impacted in countries such as Europe and Australia during the educational expansion following the Second World War (Lundgren, 1983:30). Progression towards mass provision of higher education is most advanced in the United States (Altbach, 1991:194) while Australia has been diagnosed as being in the throes of democratisation at the present time (Anderson, 1990; McGaw, 1992:53; c.f. Moodie, 1991). These differences between countries represent a lag similar to that noted between educational levels.

While Lundgren (1983:30) recognised that progressive developments influenced the curricula of different countries at different times, he did not explicitly consider the comparative timing of the codes implied by this observation. Neither did he undertake an analysis of the timing or scope of the impact of the codes across levels of education. His observation of lag effects, however, highlights the tentative and broad brush nature of the time-frames suggested for the codes.

Incorporating open learning into curriculum code theory has suggested a necessary modification to code theory to acknowledge a degree of lag in the impact of the rational and invisible codes at successive educational levels. It also suggests a need to analyse the influence of curriculum codes across educational levels in greater detail. However, this task was beyond the scope of the present work and can only be recommended as a future line of research. With this in mind, it is worth noting that little evidence of the activity of the moral code is discernable in the historical changes noted in the curriculum of higher education.

7.5.8 Review

Differences between open learning and earlier progressive movements, such as an emphasis on lifelong education, open location and timing, have been interpreted in terms of open learning's learner-centred focus on the education of adults who have many other commitments and responsibilities to fulfil and in terms of post-industrial capability for increasing the flexibility and reach of education. Post-industrialism was probably influential in increasing demand for post-compulsory education by stimulating demand for credentials and continual retraining and upgrading. Increased demand, in turn, induced reforms similar to those already enacted in primary and secondary schooling in the arena of tertiary studies.

Because of ongoing economic expansion, technological advance and the development of post-industrial capitalism, it became necessary to develop and implement policies that would provide greater access to higher education in the post-industrial era. The principles of the rational code, which were already entrenched as a means of organising school curricula and already exerting an influence at tertiary level, together with the principles of the developing invisible code were already available as a coherent whole as a guide for curriculum democratisation to accomodate mass higher education. The adult-directed, progressive development of open learning was an understandable response to these democratising pressures in this context.

Open learning is thus seen as a continuation of the process of opening institutionalised opportunities for adult learning. The roots of the process can be traced to the movements for adult and women's education and pressures for reform which impacted on higher education in the nineteenth century. These, in their turn, were not isolated movements but part of the wider diffusion of knowledge throughout Anglo-Saxon society at that time through the growth of schools, libraries, the penny press, learning societies, reading circles and so on (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:61) in association with the European Enlightenment (Phillipson, 1974:407).

Ideas which had been expressed by people such as Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and John Commenius (1592-1670) bore fruit in higher education in the nineteenth century as the impact of scientific discovery and the potential to control nature and improve human living conditions became generally evident in society (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:144). Central to this process of 'opening' learning was a fundamental epistemological shift which fed upon itself and other influences in the interim to generate an explosion of knowledge with far-reaching implications for all aspects of life. This change was from viewing knowledge as an established and treasured inheritance to something to be discovered, created and utilised in the present.

The micro-electronics revolution has given new impetus to knowledge growth and further increased its practical utility. Post-industrial capitalism has increased demands for education for this utility value, as a credentialling system for labour and as a mechanism for absorbing excess productive capacity. One problem is that as qualifications become more generally available, their status and value declines prompting an escalation in minimum standards (Collins, 1979:191; Shimbori, 1977:863). Expanded access in response to these pressures is stimulating curriculum reform towards more integrated, learner-centred programs typical of the rational code just as it did earlier at primary and secondary levels[12]. As education becomes increasingly involved in economic processes, government interest in higher education is increasing and control mechanisms typical of the invisible code are developing.

Open learning cannot be accounted for in terms of post-industrialism alone because of the great similarities it shows with progressive changes effected prior to this era in primary and secondary education. Furthermore, the history of opening opportunities for adult education, with which open learning seems intimately connected, extends well beyond this period.

This thesis has suggested that open learning should be seen, not as a novel and isolated innovation explicable within present contexts in terms of technology, meeting needs or post-industrialism, but as part of a broader process of democratisation linked to contemporary principles of knowledge control. The implications of this interpretation as well as reflections on the research process by which it has been derived are explored in the final chapter.

7.6 Summary and conclusions

Congruence and tension between theory, intended curriculum and student experience indicated that the Australian OLI was best characterised by descriptive theory of open learning stressing access and the development of human capital in response to economic need. Curriculum development in the Initiative was underpinned by technocratic considerations and there was little evidence of a philosphical basis in prescriptive theory apart from pragmatic adherence to the tenets of economic rationalism.

There was little support for an interpretation of the Initiative as a mechanism for transferring curriculum control to learners. By contrast, the Initiative can be seen to increase centralised control in open higher education in Australia. The Commonwealth directed curriculum policy in a devolved system of curriculum delivery while, at the same time, relegating financial responsibility for Open Learning to the private economy.

With respect to theory seeking explanation in context, while the Initiative was not adequately characterised in terms of technology or post-industrialism, there was some support for its interpretation as an ideology of opportunity. The driving forces behind the OLI appeared to be economic and political rather than technological or educational and its contribution to reducing the inequity of higher educational provision may have been more rhetorical than real.

In this chapter, it has been suggested that the Initiative is best understood as part of a process of raising participation in higher education to mass levels, reforming curriculum for democratisation and involving universities more closely with the needs of the national economy. The Initiative is interpreted as a manifestation of the rational curriculum code since it promoted democratisation through technocratic means and progressive philosophies while increasing state control of higher education. The Initiative exhibited a movement towards the integrated curricula characteristic of this code in its learner centredness, cross-disciplinary studies and flatter curricular structures. It did not meet the criteria of the invisible code since the mechanisms employed by the Commonwealth to control curriculum development were blatant and direct rather than subtle and embedded.

The open learning phenomenon, in general, was also considered to be a manifestation of the rational curriculum code in response to pressures to expand and democratise post-secondary education. This interpretation was supported by parallels between open learning and curricula reformed for mass provision according to the rational code. It is also logical in terms of the adult focus of open learning and in relation to post-industrial educational trends and pressures for expansion of tertiary participation. Because of a discrepancy between this interpretation and the time frame of curriculum code theory, it has been necessary to suggest a modification to code theory to acknowledge a lag in the implementation of integrated codes at post-secondary level. This lag reflects the successive democratisation of primary, secondary and tertiary education for which evidence has been presented.

Open learning has been placed within an extended historical perspective which sees it, not so much as a novel post-industrial development, but as a continuation of the expansion and opening of mechanisms for adult education which have been gaining momentum since the industrial revolution. The roots of these openings derive from revolutionary changes in epistemology encompassing humanism, realism and scientific rationality.

Endnotes

1. Compare with Jakupec and Nicoll (1994:228).

2. Corcoran (1977:82) defined a mass system as occurring when youth participation reaches 15-20%. In contrast, Sadnytzky and Bereday (1977:2774), Marceau (1993:2) and McGaw (1992:53) use 50% of age cohort attending at some time as definitive of mass education.

3. Sewart (1992:230) regarded traditional university education as learner centred because each learner's program was individualised (for example, the Oxford tutorial system). The focus, however, was mastery of a given body of knowledge and it was the tutor rather than the student who made curriculum choices.

4. Similarly, theories on lifelong learning theory (e.g. Knapper and Cropley, 1985:16) and adult learning (e.g. Knowles, 1990:57-63) incorporate principles akin to prescriptive theories of open learning.

5. Domonkos, (1977:2027) records that many Italian universities were secular.

6. In the thirteenth century, the University of Bologna, for example, was secular and admitted women (Meyer, 1965:131).

7. While university education in England was the preserve of the elite social classes, this was less the case in American colleges (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968:40).

8. Commissions to investigate Oxford and Cambridge in 1852 recognised the contribution universities could make to the nation and society (Jepson, 1973:47).

9. This pattern has been noted in England by Ellwood (1976:22) and in the USA by Brubacher and Rudy (1968:63).

10. A notable exception was the University of London external degree which was instituted in 1836 and extended to women in 1878 (Marriott, 1981:4,9). This was limited to an examining function. Another exception was Birbeck College for part-time students (Perry, W., 1976:3).

11. Data on the growth of educational particpation across educational sectors and in different countries is available in Connell (1980:360.448).

12. An early example of curriculum development in accordance with the rational code is the emergence of cross-disciplinary studies such as biochemistry. More recently, there has been a proliferation of subjects organised along thematic lines. Courses such as 'quality management' and 'garbology' incorporate information across traditional disciplines for a specific purpose.

Chapter 8

MAKING THE MOST OF OPEN LEARNING

8.1 Introduction

The understandings people hold of open learning and the meanings they attach to it implicitly shape their decisions and action in its respect. For this reason, it is appropriate to conclude this thesis with some consideration of the implications of the interpretation generated by the study. This final chapter considers the policy directions and future action which may be appropriate given that open learning is part of the process of democratising post-secondary education according to principles described by curriculum code theory. It is also appropriate to reflect on the research process through which this interpretation was generated.

8.2 Outcomes of the study

The main outcome of the study was its interpretation of open learning. A new theory has been proposed in which open learning is regarded as a manifestation of educational democratisation. In this theory, open learning is seen as part of the process of raising participation in tertiary education to mass levels in association with economic, social and political pressures. Educational democratisation is a somewhat euphemistic term which entails curriculum reform towards more integrated, learner-centred curricula as well as numerical expansion. It is thought to be proceeding according to organising principles which are a meld of pragmatism, humanism, democracy, a focus on the individual, and scientific rationality. At the same time, it involves increasingly bureaucratic and centralised control mechanisms. Open learning was also interpreted within the framework of curriculum code theory as an expression of the rational curriculum code. Strong parallels between open learning, democratisation and the rational curriculum code support the new theory.

Open learning has previously been linked to mass higher education by Farnes (1993) and, with specific reference to the Australian OLI, by Pritchard (10.11.94, pers. com.). Farnes equated open learning with mass higher education in support of theory on the industrialisation of education. Pritchard stated that the OLI was playing a role in providing mass higher education in Australia. Neither, however, elaborated the linkages between open learning and mass education, neither considered the implications of democratisation for open learning and neither referred to curriculum code theory. This study has offered a comprehensive rationale of its interpretation and is thought to be the first application of code theory to open learning.

The theory generated by the study has a number of advantages over pre-existing theory. Significantly, it is an effect of integrating disparate views of open learning. For example, theoretical conceptions of open learning in terms of access, technology, flexible, learner-centred curriculum, meeting learners' needs and learner control are melded within the theory of open learning as democratisation. Opening access reflects expansion of participation. Flexible curriculum, learner control and meeting learners' needs reflect curriculum reform commensurate with democratisation. Reliance on technology is a consequence of the need to extend access in a cost efficient manner so that mass participation is affordable. This is facilitated by the technological capabilities of the post-industrial era.

The new theory also makes sense of tensions between descriptive and prescriptive theory of open learning. Descriptive theory focusses on the actual and this highlights the technocratic nature of open learning and its focus on the individual. Prescriptive theory focusses on aspirations and ideals and this brings the progressive educational philosophy of open learning into the spotlight. Tensions between, for example, economic issues and goals of access, equity and the educational good are explicable in terms of competing elements of the rational code such as democracy, technocracy and individualism.

The new theory neither places open learning on a pedestal of naive optimism nor highlights just one facet of its nature. Instead, it is holistic and considers open learning as a whole, 'warts and all', as a typical case of what Cohen and Mohl

(1979:4) referred to as the paradox of progressive education. To some extent, the theory also 'deglamourises' both open learning and the contemporary context by placing the phenomenon in historical perspective. Elements of open learning which are continuations of long-term trends are highlighted whereas the influence of the post-industrial context is more realistically appraised.

Significantly, open learning is linked to closer integration of formal education with the needs of the economy and growing state control of education. Three waves of educational democratisation occurring successively across primary, secondary and tertiary education according to similar principles are recognised. This is supported by similarities and differences between the changes currently taking place in tertiary provision, changes which have already overtaken primary and secondary education and the curriculum patterns in open learning. Open learning is seen as a response to advancing educational democratisation as its cutting edge has reached the post-secondary level of provision and the education of adults. Differences between open learning and earlier forms of progressive education are largely explicable in terms of the adult audience of open learning and its post-industrial context.

By applying curriculum code theory to open learning, the study also made an empirical test of that theory which identified an anomaly. Because open learning is thought to be an expression of the rational code and the third phase in a successive democratisation process, there was a need to modify code theory to encompass a lag in the progression from the rational to the invisible code between schooling and tertiary level. This is a significant theoretical outcome of the study which would benefit from further scrutiny. Lundgren (1983, 1991), acknowledged differences in the timing of progressive educational developments, and therefore, by inference, the rational code, between countries but made no analysis of differences in the implementation of the code across levels of education.

The findings of the study also suggest revision of the model of learner control developed in Chapter 2. Previous studies had indicated a three part model based on students' rights, resources and competencies. Analysis of students' experiences as curriculum decision-makers in the OLI identified each learner's context as an additional frame on learner control and this needs to be included in the model. The study also identified some particular rights of students and responsibilities of providers necessary for learner control to be realised. Specifically, this was the right of learners to relevant curriculum information and the responsibility of providers to make aspects of this available prior to registration.

8.3 Implications of open learning as democratisation

The implications of regarding open learning as intimately associated with the advance of mass education need to be considered. Clearly, if open learning is linked to democratisation, it makes little sense to consider openness as a quality of individual, isolated programs. While the strengths of particular programs in meeting learners' needs are no doubt important for student-centred provision, it is the whole educational system which enables democratisation. Mass participation and curriculum reform involve the whole system. The study thus confirms Farrell's opinion that open learning needs to be system rather than institution based (Farrell, cited in Queensland Board of Advanced Education, 1989:13).

In order to meet the needs of a diverse, adult, student population it is logical, as the Queensland Board of Advanced Education (1989:3) concluded, that all options be kept open. This means retaining traditional methods as well as introducing flexible and distance learning options. To develop an 'open' learning system, a wide range of programs catering to a diversity of needs, has to be integrated into a national system in such a way that learners can access and combine a variety of elements in a suitable coherent program. This requires mechanisms for articulation as well as a range of programs. The role of government as educational sponsor and coordinator of such developments is large and can only benefit from a clear understanding of open learning as democratisation.

Growth in participation and cost efficient provision are twin demands of democratisation. Their attainment is likely to involve radical changes in practice involving mass methods and prompting reconceptualisation of what is regarded as customary and good. Open learning is thought to be contributing to this transformation but its impact will be limited and piecemeal unless it is utilised in ways which make the most of open learning for the **whole** system and not just an isolated part of it.

For open learning to have any chance of delivering what is seen as its potential for opening access, improving equity and providing cost efficient education on a mass scale, it needs to be deployed, as appropriate, for the benefit of the system as a whole in terms of economic benefits, learning effectiveness, growth in participation and flexibility. Even so, advocates of open learning should not suppose too much is possible through open learning alone for many issues of educational access and equity as well as economic and employment equity are linked to broader, social structures which operate in ways which make access contingent upon status and solidarity within the dominant discourse (e.g. Gee, 1990:8-21). There are also issues of an administrative nature concerning what it is feasible to provide by way of formal education. Institutional efficiency is not likely to be fully compatible with flexibility for students.

The need to incorporate open learning in a systems approach to democratisation assumes that the trend towards mass tertiary education will continue and that the use of open learning is either desirable and worth promoting or the most likely future scenario in any case. There are at least two issues for open learning in these assumptions and other issues related to the advance of democratisation itself. Confining the discussion to open learning, this raises questions about the value of open learning and about the inevitability of its future implementation.

Taking the issues of its inevitability first, while there is no crystal ball to foretell the future, there are trends which suggest the direction in which education is heading. Without being overly deterministic, in a sense it would seem that the die has already been cast. Educational participation has been increasing for some two hundred years and appears to have built up a considerable head of steam. Technology-based methods, such as inter-campus videoconferencing, and individualised study packages, like computerised tutorials, are being used in conventional as well as open learning programs so that the distinction between these modes is already artificial in many respects. Given that these trends are already in place, there is value in overseeing the transitions to minimise disruption, maximise the potential benefits and monitor the effects of the changes on all stakeholders so that issues of equity, social justice and humanitarian concern do not become totally submerged beneath more pragmatic objectives within de-personalised, bureaucratic systems.

On the issue of its desirability, the data of student experience presented in Chapter 6 showed open learning to be a potentially successful and rewarding way of studying for the sample studied. As previously discussed, open learning is also thought to have benefits in terms of cost-efficiency and extending access. However, specific frames which may limit that success and affect its suitability for different students were also identified. Some of these, such as curricular structures and quality, are likely to have been specific to the OLI at the time of the study and these will be discussed in that context. Others could well be associated with open learning programs generally and knowledge of these would be of value in developing systems for mass education incorporating open learning. If favourable outcomes for a large majority of students are intended, attention needs to be given to ameliorating or eliminating the adverse effects of such frames. Further investigation into limiting frames and means of reducing their effects is therefore advisable.

With rising levels of participation, frames centred on the learner self are likely to rise in significance as learners of diverse backgrounds and ability enter the system and as more learners combine study with work and other activities. This is one reason that democratisation involves learner-centred curricula offering flexible options for study and a wide variety of courses and support.

The need to consider open learning from a system-wide perspective is particularly important in the Australian situation in which OLA is reliant on existing provision and credit transfer. While OLA remains marginalised and isolated from the Unified

National System of Higher Education and under-resourced as it is now, its role in a democratised system will be impaired. Early in its life, students found curriculum structures and quality limiting. To fulfil its role as part of a system of mass education, OLA depends on good articulation with other modes of provision and, to date, this has happened only to a limited extent. It also requires funding adequate for quality provision and student support if it is to be a viable and fruitful option. Unless service and support is of, at least, an equivalent standard to alternative provision, retention and student outcomes may be jeopardised. There is also the danger that degrees by open learning may be regarded as second class for there is the argument that a degree certifies not merely a standard of performance but also a process valuable in its own right (Moodie, 1991).

In its present form, the Initiative could well lead to a relocation of the bottle neck of unmet demand, rather than its removal, as students compete for entry to conventional courses after gaining some credit with open learning. There could also be an escalation in the educational requirements needed for entry to the Unified National System of Higher Education by those not proceeding directly from school as a grounding in Open Learning is used to demonstrate competence in university study. Unless the curriculum continues to expand and/or transfer access improves and unless perceived quality is also improved, the Initiative is likely to provide temporary relief to the problem and political embarrassment of unmet demand but not a workable alternative pathway facilitating mass access and equity.

On the other hand, the very existence of OLA (established by the Initiative) through its open access policy and credit transfer arrangements appears to be working as a democratising force through the credit exchange it has already established and through its effect, small as yet, of reforming curricula for an enlarged clientele as discussed in Chapter 7.

Movement towards democratisation places clear strain on educational resources as the system is expanded for larger numbers of students. It is hardly surprising that the limitations of the Initiative flowed in large measure from economic constraints.

Under the present arrangements, OLA offers a 'no-frills' alternative at an equivalent price or a more expensive, comparable service (in many units). Competition for funded, tertiary places in Australia occurs on a meritocratic basis. While Open Learning offers a value-added alternative to conventional education in some respects (see page 207), it also caters for unmet demand. Some might take the attitude that it is better to have an inferior car than no transportation at all or the attitude that beggars can't be choosers. In either case, OLA is accepted as an appendage or remedial supplement to the main system and the opportunity to redesign the system for democratisation by exploiting the promised potential of open learning goes unexplored. With such 'bandaid' approaches, the value-added advantages of studying by Open Learning reported by students remain under-capitalised and devalued by their association with significant impediments.

As things stand, the future of OLA is uncertain and more than a little precarious. The Senate Inquiry into the Development of Open Learning in Australia doubted the capacity of OLA to sustain its operations under the present course pricing structures (Senate Inquiry, 1994:20). Recent suggestions of changing the ownership of the company in favour of either a consortium of participants (Pritchard, 10.11.1994, pers. com.) or the AV-CC (Senate Inquiry, 1994:6) also indicate that the program is unlikely to be self supporting in its present form by 1996 when Commonwealth sponsorship under the original Agreement comes to an end[1].

The financial viability of OLA is likely to suffer still further in the wake of the recent fall in demand for tertiary places reported by Illing (1995b) since a proportion of its registrations derive from unmet demand (e.g. Pritchard, 1994 cited in Senate Inquiry, 1994:43). The way is also open for competitors to enter the field and this would destabilise OLA's position even more. Universities, either individually or in a consortium, are legally able to market their courses directly to students through the non-award mechanism (see pages 160,182: Endnote 18). A simple means of doing this would be to offer applicants in excess of prescribed quotas a non-award route to degree completion. Compared with participating in the Initiative, universities would have the advantages of retaining policy and managerial control of their courses as well as the full student fee. However, they would need to undertake enrolment and advisory services on their own behalf - something they already do for their other courses. Universities using this strategy would have a competitive advantage in not being bound to limit fees to the HECS equivalent. In the face of such competition, it is unlikely that OLA could survive as a commercial proposition. Yet it is committed to continue to offer its services under present conditions for ten years (Australian Government Solicitor, 1993:3).

On the available evidence, universities are not taking up this option of competing with OLA but are, instead, expanding their involvement with it. This is, perhaps, due more to fear of the consequences of not participating than faith in the viability of the program (e.g. Wilson, 1994 cited in Senate Inquiry, 1994:25). Ironically, such action makes viability more likely and could be used to justify demands for greater cost efficiency across higher education as a whole.

Another possible future for OLA is that it might move from the business of Bachelor's degrees to fill alternative market niches. Post-graduate and TAFE certificates are already on offer through OLA (OLAA, 1995a:4, 1995b:2). In the post-graduate market, OLA faces competition from the PAGE consortium. OLA might also fill a niche between university and TAFE with an American-style, two-year college degree. The General Studies degree requiring no third level studies is, perhaps, a step in this direction.

Against these possible scenarios there is the opportunity and the need to re-examine tertiary education in Australia in the light of democratisation and open learning's role in it. As the present marginalisation of OLA stems from funding constraints, there is a need to re-examine funding structures in the first instance. The second major issue if open learning is to be part of a fully integrated system - and this arises from the first - is credit recognition.

With respect to funding, the Senate Inquiry has recommended that the Commonwealth support study through OLA at 50% of the rate it funds conventional student load with additional funding for a student advisory service (Senate Inquiry, 1994:5). A rate lower than conventional funding is justified since no allowance need be made for capital infrastructure or university research and some benefit might be anticipated from the use of existing courseware. The figure recommended by the Inquiry is perhaps more than a minimal one. In the UK, the Open University achieves a 50% cost efficiency over other universities (Widdowson, 1994 cited in Senate Inquiry, 1994:26) and the services it provides include course development, research and tutorial support which the Australian scheme does not. Even though the potential for economies of scale may be lower in Australia, the Inquiry judged that some saving should be possible (Senate Inquiry, 1994:27). Detailed analyses could give more precise cost estimates for funding purposes.

Additional funding as recommended by the Inquiry could go a long way to improving the current inequity in services and support between OLA units and external university subjects. However, the Commonwealth is unlikely to adopt such a funding arrangement in conjunction with an open entry policy for this would entail an unspecified, yet no doubt considerable, additional expenditure.

Although valuable in respect of student support, funding for study through Open Learning would not, of itself, solve the issue of credit transfer although it could lead to some improvement deriving from changing perceptions of OLA's processes, support and academic value. Limited credit transfer was a problem for students interviewed for this study and was also considered by the Senate Inquiry (1994:54), which reported a year and a half later, to be restricting the flexible use of Open Learning. Participating universities are obligated to provide credit transfer and have been offered a 20% funding premium on load generated by students transferring with credit from Open Learning to conventional courses. However, the slow progress, to date, in expanding credit transfer suggests, firstly, that the difficulties of doing so have been underestimated and, secondly, that more powerful mechanisms for extending credit transfer need to be found if the present brokering model is to be successful.

Were OLA to be funded as the Senate Inquiry suggests, the original economic reasons for establishing it outside the Unified National System without the power to grant degrees would no longer be an issue. As the funding barrier would be removed, it would be feasible to empower OLA to confer awards as part of the System while continuing to operate as it does now. Although state legislation would be required for this to occur, this is less likely to be a barrier than the obligation of funding itself.

While this proposal appears to offer an improvement on the present position with respect to equity of funding and credit transfer, it would have the effect of maintaining existing distinctions between open learning and conventional courses and would tend to confine open learning in one compartment of the system.

To encourage the use of open learning throughout the whole system, OLA could be reformulated as a credit-transfer bank and agency similar to that in British Columbia which also operates on a brokerage model. The Senate Inquiry (1994:67) was of the view that AV-CC ownership of OLA would improve credit transfer. However, in 1995, a pilot credit transfer authority, ACTA, was established as a project of the AV-CC. This meant that credit transfer was neither a function of OLA nor that of a fully independent authority. Despite the Senate Inquiry's optimism regarding institutional support under such a structure, establishment of a credit transfer agency under the auspices of the AV-CC would seem to leave such reform to the mercy of conservative forces. Only an independent authority is likely to ensure rapid progress in this area.

Development and use of open learning courseware could be fostered through a variety of devices such as seed funding for collaborative curriculum development and incentives for students to take Open Learning units. A HECS discount or credit against HECS debt is one way this might be promoted.

If the differential rate of funding between Open Learning and standard courses were dropped and a single rate of funding, irrespective of mode of delivery, adopted, there should be economic advantages for institutions in using it as appropriate and at their discretion. It may then be feasible to phase in, over a period of years, an increase in the number of funded places at a lower rate of funding per place to achieve growth and cost efficiency across the whole system. The detail and fine tuning of such a scheme would need to be made on the basis of detailed economic information.

Reference was made earlier to frames which were found to be limiting learners' decision-making in the Initiative. The policy suggestions above have addressed limiting curricular structures deriving from funding mechanisms and credit transfer but there remains a need to respond to quality issues more fully and address other limiting frames.

Learner perceptions of poor quality seem to have stemmed largely from economic constraints in conjunction with inordinate haste to implement the program. Cost efficiency and a business orientation presided over educational concerns compounding quality issues with inequity and a lack of student support. Lack of lead time contributed to administrative blunders and policy vacua all of which contributed less than favourably to students' experiences.

There is an obvious temptation to dismiss quality issues as the hiccoughs of a new venture in order to protect the image, reputation and viability of the program. The implication in so doing is that a similar study, conducted later, would not uncover as many concerns about quality. While the study was necessarily a snapshot of the Initiative at a specific time in the development of a rapidly growing project, ongoing concern for the financial viability of the educational broker established through the Initiative (OLA) together with a program of rapid expansion (e.g. increase in the number of units on offer and delivery overseas) does not inspire confidence that resources are likely to have been directed to quality improvement to the extent required. There is therefore an important need for ongoing monitoring of quality and the development of quality assurance mechanisms. This conclusion is supported by the interim report of the evaluation of the OLI which noted a need for learning support and recommended that effective quality control procedures be instituted (Atkinson et al., 1995:67; Healy, 1995). Since the study was conducted, Open Net has been established to offer computerised learning support. The success of this venture is yet to be determined.

The Initiative also serves as an example of how quality and structures may suffer if preparation is inadequate. In future projects, heeding this warning would mean directing more attention and resources to lead time planning. Beth's case (page 192), in particular, also demonstrates the fruits of allowing rigid, bureaucratic mechanisms and a business orientation to displace humanitarian compassion.

In a mass system of education incorporating open learning, quality monitoring needs to be inbuilt. Evaluation and needs analysis would be critical to the realisation of a responsive, learner-centred system in a mechanised and less personalised system. All institutions involved with open learning would do well to reconsider their practices with this in mind.

8.4 Reflections on the study

Amongst other things, this study has addressed the need to understand open learning more fully. While this was largely taken as a premise in the opening chapter and used as the raison d'etre of the study, the multifarious nature of the open learning concept has been amply demonstrated both in Chapter 4 and by tensions within and between the curriculum conceptions of open learning examined. Such confusion was clearly not conducive to either theoretical advancement or policy development and there is obvious value in an understanding of open learning which integrates and encompasses these tensions.

The study approached its task from a curriculum perspective. Perhaps the greatest benefit of this came from considering open learning programs and philosophies as part of larger, changing, educational systems linked to their cultural contexts. Application of the anthropological-relativist, curriculum tradition directed attention beyond attempts at simple comparison and definition and beyond immediate time-frames to an appreciation of open learning's role in longer term, educational developments.

This culminated in the view that open learning is a continuation of trends to expand and reform higher and adult education which have been growing stronger, in fits and starts, over at least some two hundred years. There are ways in which this view is both humbling and comforting as well as informative. It reminds us that our present achievements build on accomplishments which come before, helps set our present problems and proposed solutions in perspective and provides knowledge of trends and pressures as a basis for decision making. There are also ways in which this view sounds a note of caution, for, underlying these reforms, have been growing linkages between tertiary education and the needs of the economy and growing mechanisms of centralised, bureaucratic control. This indicates a certain instrumentality about the development of open learning which should serve to temper utopian visions of the future.

The curriculum perspective taken in this study pointed to a broad, interpretive approach and prompted consideration of open learning as theory, intended curriculum and student learning experience. While not exhaustive, these conceptions were relevant to theoretical issues and of value as a knowledge base for policy making, particularly in the Australian context. For the latter purpose, the study compiled data from various stakeholders in the OLI including policy makers, program implementors and student end-users.

On the grounds that the flexibilities and choices available through open learning gave learners control over aspects of curriculum, curriculum control was selected as the organising focus of the study. While this approach was in prospect, a logical way of seeking to understand open learning and, in retrospect, a productive means of doing so, it, again, does not exhaust potential avenues of addressing the problem. Neither can the interpretation generated claim to be definitive because interpretation is a process involving a fusion of horizons which is potentially endless (Gadamer, 1976:39). The study should be seen as a contribution to an ongoing conversation about open learning inviting further speculation and research in reply.

In particular, the study has contributed to two interwoven threads of conversation on open learning: one, a theoretical debate, the other, concerned with policy and practice particularly with respect to university, undergraduate open learning in Australia. In discussing the implications of the study, it has been necessary to address both of these conversations although it was neither possible nor desirable to entirely delineate the two.

The study's focus on curriculum control led to the development of a package of analytical tools which included curriculum code theory and the decision-making concepts, frame and decision-making space. Curriculum code theory provided a ready historical model of changing patterns of curriculum control while the frame and decision-making concepts facilitated analysis of the specific case. This suite of tools is itself an outcome of the study because, although each of the concepts included was pre-existing, they were combined for the study. The suite could be applied for further research into patterns of curriculum control. The study was distinctive in applying the decision-making perspective to students.

As well as proving effective for the purpose for which they were designed, and therefore an example for similar studies, there would also seem to be the potential for the decision-making perspective to be applied to studies of how learners actually use a distance education or open learning course. This knowledge would be of benefit for curriculum design and might contribute to making course content and learning processes more flexible to suit learners with differing learning styles. If open learning is to achieve the potential it is seen as having to encourage a developmental approach to learning (e.g. Boot and Hodgson, 1987:15; Snell et al., 1987:166), the decision-making perspective would be particularly appropriate.

In the event, the learner-control theory of open learning proved inadequate to the OLI and was also passed over as a general explanation or description of the phenomenon. This eventual rejection is not considered to have devalued the approach, however, for it was able to distinguish between competing theoretical conceptions on the basis of the curriculum control patterns they implied. The analytical tools moulded the analysis in terms of curriculum control but were sufficiently open to allow a wealth of data to be considered and an alternative interpretation generated.

Because the learner-control model was rejected, there is a need to consider the reasons that this particular theory of open learning is given so much credence. One explanation is that there may be a number of different kinds of program bearing the name, open learning. In other words, there may be distinct variants of open learning with different patterns of curriculum control. Thus, while learner control is not the most appropriate theory for the OLI, perhaps there are other programs for which it is appropriate. The existence of Honours programs and independent study programs which attempt to implement a philosophy of learner control (e.g. Wedmeyer, 1977) suggests that this may indeed be the case.

On the other hand, considerable confidence that the OLI shares its pattern of curriculum control with a number of other significant open learning programs can be derived from the prominence of access-oriented conceptions of open learning and from the general trend of expanding access to higher education. This view is also supported by considering the missions and operations of a sampling of prominent open learning programs. For example, the UKOU (Perry, W., 1977), the Open Polytechnic (Hardy, 1991) and the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong (Reid, C., and Robertshaw, 1992), all focus on opening access and cost efficient provision rather than learner control of curriculum. The Open Learning Agency of British Columbia, Canada, is, perhaps, one example in which learners are offered greater control of content and mode. This institution acts as a credit bank and aims to extend opportunities for degree study, vocational courses and leisure (Lundin, 1988:55; *Open learning and distance education in Canada*, 1989:1,12). Yet, even in this case, students appear to be curriculum-takers with little say in establishing the rules by which tertiary education is played.

Despite this evidence that the OLI is not atypical of open learning programs in these significant respects, the study, nevertheless, based its interpretation on one particular instance of open learning. Reliance on a single case, necessarily, casts a query over its representativeness and the generalisability of the interpretation as a whole. Consequently, the possibility, that learner control reflects the norm in the wider population of open learning programs remains - even though this seems unlikely on the evidence above. Nevertheless, because of this query, it would be advisable for a future study to examine the curriculum control patterns of a larger number of programs in the light of this study. The possibility of idiosyncratic effects due to the Initiative's brokering structure or levels of resourcing could then be examined. The major focus in such an investigation would need to be the extent to which control - in the sense of learner empowerment rather than in the sense of limited curriculum choices - was transferred to learners.

With the new theory in mind, it would also be valuable for studies of other programs to establish the extensiveness of the trend of centralising government control of open learning and to examine the nature of the mechanisms used for curriculum control in this arena of educational endeavour. This would allow the status of open learning with respect to the rational and invisible codes to be determined in a larger number of cases.

Another explanation of the prominence of learner control theory, is that casting open learning in these terms aligns it more closely with adult learning theory in which self-directed learning is held to be an educational good. The intimate, if unacknowledged, connection between open learning and the education of adults may promote transference of educational theory between the two. From another point of view, the learner-control conception of curriculum is coherent with the progressive elements of individualism and democracy in open learning. Its prominence can therefore be seen as an expression of these elements of the rational and invisible curriculum codes.

Edwards' (1991) explanation of open learning which casts it as an ideology of opportunity is also relevant and there is a sense in which mass education and all forms of progressive education fulfil this purpose. The prominence of learner-control conceptions of open learning may thus represent the realignment of educational theory with the discourses of post-industrial capitalism noted by Gee and Lankshear (1995). These discourses promote the need for flexible workers responsible for their own education and professional development. The interpretation presented by this study encompasses this view.

There have been a number of developments in open learning since the study was conducted. Some of these, for example the establishment of OLESS, Open Net and ACTA and the conduct of an evaluation of the OLI have already been mentioned. Considerable growth and development has also taken place within OLA itself. The impact of these developments is beyond the scope of this study, however, its findings highlight the importance of monitoring these developments closely. While the study is necessarily a portrait of the Initiative at the time of the study, its significance transcends its value as a description of history. Its main contribution is its theoretical interpretation of open learning and this is based on aspects of the Initiative which appear to remain unchanged by recent developments.

8.5 A final word

The general thrust of the argument in this chapter has been that for open learning to contribute effectively to educational democratisation, it is inappropriate to consider open learning in terms of individual programs. Specifically, it has been argued that a system wide approach needs to be adopted. The assumption behind this is that systems are organised on a national basis. However, opening opportunities for education is becoming a matter, not only of national educational systems, but also of global arrangements for education.

Advances in communications and a free-market climate in educational services mean that delivery and organisation of education on this scale is a coming reality. In the future, opportunities for tertiary education are likely to be affected by the international marketing of educational products. This has the advantages of international business opportunities and foreign exchange for the provider, advantages of access and possibly quality for learners but the cultural, educational and economic disadvantages of invasion by foreign curricula. It may be that governments, if they continue to encourage a market orientation to education, will encounter difficulty in maintaining control of their developing national systems as corporate interests and competing governments operate across national borders and education is globalised.

In conclusion, the implications of considering open learning in terms of curriculum code theory need to be considered. Code theory, while necessarily reductive, provides a broad overview of general, educational trends. The codes represent an historical progression and a summary of ongoing tendencies. Open learning has been positioned by this study, not with the latest known code in this progression to date, but in an intermediary position. This has implications for code theory as already discussed and also for crystal ball gazing on open learning.

Code theory describes systems of mass education as moving towards increasing levels of centralised control and progressing from control mechanisms involving overt, mandatory manipulation of curriculum to bureaucratic and hidden controls. The study suggested that, in open learning, governmental controls are currently overt. Code theory implies that the progression which has already been observed in primary and secondary education will shortly overtake tertiary teaching. This suggests that, in the future, governments are likely to coordinate and control open learning to a greater extent and to use hidden mechanisms of control for this purpose.

Government-directed research and evaluation are likely to play a growing role in the development of open learning as the invisible code becomes entrenched. This is likely to include control of curriculum content as well as the work of teachers. To the extent that these changes may be responsive to the diversity of educational needs within the community, this is perhaps not altogether a bad thing as a means of overcoming inappropriate resistance to change. The concern is that these hidden mechanisms may displace debate and contestation as a means of policy formation and make it even more difficult to recognise practices reconstitutive of present inequities.

The ongoing globalisation and corporatisation of both industry and education is perhaps a pointer to the code which may eventually succeed the invisible code as a means and philosophy of organising curriculum. Large corporations in Canada and the United States already offer educational programs leading to awards, including the Doctor of Philosophy. This may well be an indicator of both a corporately controlled, educational culture for the future Australian context and a curriculum code based on corporate control, to come:

While these changes are imaginable as a projection of the tendencies described by code theory, it also seems likely that open learning could precipitate change beyond present imaginings. This is because open learning challenges a fundamental premise on which curriculum is based. Whereas formal education has, in the past, been separate from sites of production creating the need in curriculum to select, represent and transmit items of knowledge and culture to be learned outside of their context of use, open learning enables learning to be integrated with productive contexts. This entails more than simply studying at home or on-the-job, in-house training sessions but does not imply a return to oral traditions and apprenticeship learning systems. The consequences of such a change are as yet unknown. It may mean a greater sense of ownership, community and democracy about the creation and utilisation of knowledge or it may mean increasing enslavement to capitalist production systems.

Reintegration of learning with productive contexts together with Information Age information handling capacity and forms, hints at collaborative, problem-based, networking arrangements in which instant, real-time access to experts and knowledge sources are available as a resource for every human endeavour. It hints at an ethereal, shared and fluid amoeba-like knowledge base divorced from the stability of the written word with the potential to redefine even our sense of social reality and identity (Lankshear and Peters, in press).

In conjunction with a transition to electronic communications and text forms, open learning may prove as revolutionary to the way knowledge is created, presented, organised and conceived as writing, the book and the printing press seem to have been in the past. The stability, fixity and unity of the book is likely to be replaced by dynamic networks in which authorship and ownership is difficult to ascertain as information is edited and integrated for innumerable, particular purposes (Lankshear and Peters, in press).

Where this may lead is a matter of pure conjecture from the present vantage point however, on past performance, it is likely that knowledge and learning will remain an area of social contestation. Lankshear and Peters (in press) have already noted tendencies towards using 'cyberspace' and digital text within the same epistemological presumptions as before rather than accessing their transformative potential but this may be merely a temporary feature and sediment of earlier modes of operating.

Open learning would seem to have potential as an ideology of opportunity and as an emerging social practice re-instantiating present relations of power. It also has potential as a language of possibility[2] and a tool for emancipatory, social change. The appeal of open learning for the researcher is that the contrasts it provides between hope and happening[3], between prescription and description and between the ideal and the real, are particularly stark generating the confusion which the study has sought to address.

Endnotes

1. In response to this speculation, Monash University has stated its intention to retain control of OLA (Robbins, 1994:25).

2. This expression was coined by Aronowitz and Giroux (1986:154).

3. This expression is from the title of Lundgren's (1983) book, *Between hope and happening: text and context in curriculum*.

APPENDIX A

SOURCES OF PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS

Arnold, John (Dr.).

Coordinator, OLA Australian Studies unit, *Out of Empire*, Monash University.

Calvert, Jocelyn (Prof.).

Then, Director, Institute of Distance Education, Deakin University. Member, Academic Programs Board, Open Learning Australia. Currently, Deakin University.

Chick, John (Prof.).

Director, Distance Education Centre, University of New England.

Collis-George, Nicholas (Mr.).

Head, Children's and Education Department, ABC TV.

Cowie, Jan (Dr.).

Coordinator, proposed OLA Economics unit, University of South Australia.

Cree, Murray (Prof.).

Head, Business School, Monash University.

Gelonesi, Joe (Mr.).

Radio National, ABC.

Gollan, Ross (Mr.).

Coordinator, OLA Statistics unit, *Against All Odds*, Deakin University.

Johnson, Richard (Prof.).

Open learning consultant and Visiting Fellow, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University.

Joy, Sally (Dr.).

Then, Coordinator, OLA Marketing unit, *Marketing: Theory and Practice*, Monash University. Currently, General Manager, Academic and Technology Services, OLA.

Kemmis, Stephen (Prof.).

Faculty of Education, Deakin University.

Lister, Pamela (Ms).

Faculty of Law, Monash University.

Lundin, Roy (Dr.).

Open learning consultant and Senior Lecturer, Queensland University of Technology.

Moodie, Gavin (Mr.).

Then, Special Projects Officer, Faculty of Business and Economics, Monash University and consultant to Open Learning Australia. Formerly, Manager, Television Open Learning Project. Currently, Deputy Director, South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre.

Pritchard, Anthony (Mr.).

Managing Director, Open Learning Australia.

Quartly, Marian (Ass. Prof.).

Chair, Bachelor of General Studies Management Committee, Monash University.

Reid, Jo (Ms.).

Corporate Services, Deakin University.

Scheffer, John (Mr.).

Coordinator, Bachelor of General Studies, Monash University.

Scriven, Bruce (Mr.).

Manager, Open Learning Unit, Queensland University of Technology.

Spearitt, Peter, (Prof.).

Coordinator, OLA Australian Studies unit, *Out of Empire*, Monash University.

Walker, Robert (Prof.).

Faculty of Education, Deakin University.

Walker, David (Prof.).

Coordinator, OLA Australian Studies unit, *Out of Empire*, Deakin University.

Weeks, Ian (Dr.).

Coordinator, OLA Religion unit, *The Long Search*, Deakin University.

Whitlock, Gillian (Dr.).

Coordinator, OLA Australian Studies unit, *Images of Australia*, Griffith University.

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO STUDENTS

23 February 1993

Dear student,

Open learning offers new means of studying for a degree in Australia. Information from students about studying this way should help improve its quality. I am a doctoral student at the Queensland University of Technology. I am interested in your use of open learning options to meet your individual needs. Organisers of the Open Leaning Agency of Australia have given me permission to introduce myself and invite you to participate in my research. Your participation is very important and may prove helpful in your learning.

The time commitment need be no more than one hour in telephone discussion. **Please complete the details below and return this form to me immediately in the Reply Paid envelope.** I appreciate your help in this project. You may be confident that personal details will not be available to anyone except myself and any report will protect your confidentiality. You will have the right of access to the information you provide and I will be happy to provide a summary report if you wish.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Williams

Helen Williams
Faculty of Education
Queensland University of Technology

QUESTION (Tick the appropriate box)	Yes	No
I am willing to discuss my Open Learning experiences on the telephone		
I live within easy reach of a university campus		
I live in a rural or remote area		
I have a disability		
English is my second language		
I am an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander		
I completed my schooling in the last two years		

QUESTION (tick the appropriate box)	0	1	2
Number of parents who went to university or college			

Name:

Local Council: **Your Postcode:**

Telephone: Area code ( ) Number

Sex: Male Female **Enrolled subjects:**

Your educational qualifications:

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES
OF STUDENT RESPONDENTS AND INTERVIEWED SAMPLE

Table 5. Demographic data on sample populations

Demographic characteristic		Total Respondents (n=533) %	Interviewed Sample (n=44) %
Gender	Female	63.6	68.2
	Male	35.6	31.8
	No response	0.8	0.0
Disability	Has a disability	4.3	9.1
	Has no disability	89.5	84.1
	No response	5.4	4.5
First language	English	87.2	77.3
	Not English	7.3	18.2
	No response	5.4	4.5
Aboriginality	Not ATSI[1]	93.8	86.4
	ATSI	0.0	4.5
	No response	6.2	9.1
School leaver	Not school leaver	88.7	81.8
	School leaver	5.4	13.6
	No response	5.8	4.5
Parents education	None university/college	69.0	61.4
	One university/college	20.1	25.0
	Two university/college	9.6	13.6
	No response	1.3	0.0
Live near university	Not near university	24.0	38.6
	Near university	74.7	59.1
	No response	1.3	2.3
Perceived remoteness	Not remote	61.4	61.4
	Remote	20.3	34.1
	No response	5.4	4.5
Educational qualifications	<Matriculation	14.8	18.2
	Matriculation	28.7	38.6
	TAFE	8.2	9.1
	University/CAE[2]	31.3	20.4
	Other qualification	9.2	11.4
	No response	7.7	2.3

Table 5 continued

Demographic characteristic		Total Respondents (n=533) %	Interviewed Sample (n=44) %
Remoteness by postcode[3]	Urban	70.7	63.6
	Provincial city	3.4	0.0
	Rural city	3.6	4.5
	Other rural area	14.1	11.4
	Remote town	0.6	4.5
	Other remote area	2.1	9.1
	No response	5.5	6.8
Index of disadvantage[4]	<90	0.9	0.0
	90-99	31.7	38.6
	100-109	36.4	34.1
	110-119	23.5	18.3
	>120	1.9	2.3
	No response	5.6	6.8
Units studied	Anthropology	5.5	9.1
	Accounting	16.0	20.5
	Australian studies	4.7	6.8
	Child development	7.9	6.8
	Environmental studies	7.1	13.7
	French	13.4	6.8
	Marketing	16.9	22.7
	Mathematics	2.1	2.3
	Politics	2.1	2.3
	Psychology	24.3	34.1
	Religion	7.9	11.4
	Science	1.0	0.0
	Spanish	4.0	4.6
	Statistics	7.4	15.9
	No response	2.4	0.0

Appendix C Endnotes

1. ATSI - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
2. CAE - College of Advanced Education.
3. Determined using the Commonwealth Department of Primary Industries and Energy classification of regions (Arundell, 1991, Appendix E). See thesis page 92.
4. Determined from respondents' postcodes and the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Index of Socio-economic Disadvantage (See thesis page 93).

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW THEMES

Round 1.

Introduction

- Request participation in the study
- Negotiate consent and permission to record interviews
- Explain students' role in the study
- Invite queries

Data collection

- Reasons for studying
- Considerations taking into account in deciding to study
- Degree/academic plans
- Reasons for choosing OLA
- Reasons for not taking conventional entry or distance education
- Reasons for choosing particular unit/s
- Perceptions of Open Learning (e.g. Expectations of studying this way. Aspects found appealing. Concerns about studying this way)
- Plans for studying OLA units (e.g. Plans for studying, for using the TV programs, doing the assignments and exams. Learning style)

Information about next interview

- Discuss timing
- Pre-view themes for next interview

Conclusion

- Thanks for participation

Round 2.

Introduction

- Negotiate continued participation

Data collection

- Experiences of studying through Open Learning
- Perceived advantages of studying through Open Learning
- Perceived disadvantages of studying through Open Learning
- Deviation from expectation
- Studying decisions (e.g. Use of the TV programs and learning materials. Method of doing assignments, method of studying and preparing for exams)
- Academic plans (e.g. for next study period and later)
- Reasons for any change of plan

Information about next interview

- Timing
- Pre-view themes for next interview

Conclusion

- Thanks for participation

Round 3.

Introduction

- Negotiate continued participation

Data collection

- Experiences since last interview
- Examination experiences
- Academic progress
- Current study commitments
- Academic plans
- Reasons for any change of plans
- Suitability of Open Learning
- Student perceptions of openness in Open Learning
- Aspects of curriculum perceived to be under learners' control

Conclusion

- Thanks for participation

340

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343

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361

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